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POLISH FEMINISM BETWEEN EAST AND WEST. THE FORMATION OF THE
POLISH WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IDENTITY

by

MAGDALENA GRABOWSKA

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Dissertation Director: Professor Joanna Regulska

By focusing on the unique forces that shape women's movements in the post-communist context, this dissertation asks if the established geopolitical and theoretical frameworks, based on dichotomies between East and West, South and North can be utilized outside these locations. Or is a new framework necessary to fully understand the specific processes that are at work in the ambiguous "Second" World location? Chapter One, traces the individual and collective trajectories of Polish women's movement to the 19th century anti-partition mobilizations, the Second World War, the 1968 students' liberation movement, the "Solidarity" labor union, and the 1990s Polish debate on abortion. Chapter Two identifies two elements as crucial for the unique development of transnational activism in the context of CEE: 1) its trajectory ("late" arrival into the international feminist space) and 2) the domination and critique of the EU "gender mainstreaming" paradigm within gender social justice discourses. Chapter Three recognizes the 1990s "abortion debate" became an impulse for the feminisms to move beyond the borders of the conservative nation state and bring the question of women's sexual rights into the supranational political spaces and became a momentum

for the emergence of versatile, vibrant mobilizations for gender and sexual justice in Poland and (e.g. European Court of Justice decision in the case of Alicja Tysiac against the Polish state). Chapter Four argues that secularism that had become, a necessary feminist response to violent and oppressive discourses that act to restrict women's sexualities and rights, has also hindered feminist connectivity with religious women. In Poland a *purification* of the sexuality, emergence of the "political Catholicism" and "secular feminism" produced the subaltern, traveling identities of Catholic feminists. Chapter Five examines re-appropriation of the Anti-Semitic language of civic strangeness, historically represented by Polish Jews to the experience of sexual minorities. In conclusion this dissertation delineates two factors as decisive for current positionality of the "Second" world in the transnational feminist theory and practice: the rejection of Marxism as representing the colonial practices from the East (Russia, Soviet Union), the prioritization of the supranational engagements with the European Union and Western Europe rather than Third World.

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Foregrounding the plurality of feminisms is essential for any book seeking to trace global feminist activism for feminism operates within and across variety of intellectual, historical, political geographic, and temporal frame. Culling the rich literature on feminism, it is possible to find authoritative accounts of feminism as an idea, a set of political convictions a mode of identification with other women, a way of being a woman, a collective identity available for men and women, a form of political mobilization, a policy agenda, legacy a means of forcing the “we” that Beauvoir thought that women lacked, a strategy for forging alliances and building allegiance, a praxis, a vision of alternative possibilities, an imagines community, a process of creating something new, a tactic for transforming social relations, an inclusive, participatory politics, and expensive conception of justice encompassing economic distribution, political rights and liberties, collective responsibility, a dispute solution” (Hawkesworth, 2006, 25)

Introduction: “*Standing astride*”. Polish feminist identities in transition

What does it mean to be a feminist in the context of post- socialism? When I interviewed Ania in the summer of 2006, she was extremely busy juggling her work as a director of a feminist NGO, an active member of an informal group “8 March Women’s Alliance,” and as a secretary of the regional branch of the Polish Green Party. In her mid 30s and involved in various types of feminist activism, Ania described her positionality in the movement as straddling between various feminist generations, institutional engagements and ideologies. “I’m standing astride” she argued, locating her activism “in between” what she perceived as an older institutionalized feminism embedded in the work of the feminist NGOs and the “generation 2000,” a new wave of feminist activism in Poland. Ania claimed that characteristic of her activism is the utilization of various positions to talk and act as a feminist:

Depending on the belonging one evaluates which goals are the most important. When we look at the feminist activism from the perspective of OŚKa, one of the most important things is the introduction of the issues related to the equality of women and men into the public discourse: to educate the society, to make people sensitive to these issues, and of course legislator changes. Here the issue of reproductive rights, the question of the making decisions about one's body. What else? Preventing violence. And the whole spectrum but strictly tied to the political activism and the attempt of real change (...) (...) But if we look at the "gut" feminism, which focuses on one's bellybutton and the talking about one's insights, then the most important issues are the self-realization, subjectivity, and this is going to be very individualistic approach, that has nothing to do with going out in public (r23)

With some feminist colleagues, she has shared her path and been involved in certain forms of activism, like NGOs work and street actions; others were still foreign to her. But what Ania recognized as "glue" that brings together various struggles and multiple strategies was a "bottom line" definition of the feminist feminism as a movement and a movement's internal accountability. According to Ania, such shared definition of feminism comprises of understanding feminism as:

political movement; political social movement that has a very serious goals, but most of all it is a certain life choice. In short my definition is that first you have to see that women are worse off, second the person rejects such state, and third she actively fights it, she acts to change. For me one of the most important aspects of feminism is a political dimension, political activity, but not understood as party politics; it can even mean activism in the cultural sphere but always subversive, always critical towards culture and reality. And activism, being active, is the most important aspect here (r23).

My dissertation aims at reconstructing the complexity and multidimensionality of Polish feminisms and locating the newly emerged and not yet fully explored movement within the transnational feminist debates. My goal is threefold: to trace the trajectory of the ambivalent location of the Second World between East and West, to delineate current generational, institutional and ideological transformations of Polish feminists movement, and to ask how the new hybrid, fragmented identities that emerge at the intersection of local legacies and transnational “gender” discourses shape out understanding of scattered and multilayered feminist mobilizations.

The first part of my work explores the ambivalent positionality of the Polish feminist movement within the transnational feminist debates framed around the First vs. Third World dichotomies. I identified a number of factors as contributing to the lack of the conceptualizations of the “Second World” within the transnational feminists debates: the absence of feminist organizations from the international women’s movement until 1995, the reluctance to identify with the Third World women’s struggles and indifference toward the critique of the “Western” feminisms are among them. In this part of this work I ask what is the Second World? What is the specificity of this region and how its particularities are embedded in its deeper geopolitical and cultural trajectories? Chapter One traces the genealogies of the collective and individual Polish feminist identities from the 19th Century through the socialist period up until the end of socialism. The aim of Chapter One is to look at Polish feminists as part of Polish history and political culture rather than approaching the Polish feminism as a socialist implant or a western import. Focusing on the case of Poland, I explore the versatile genealogies of Polish feminisms from 19th century Polish partition through socialism, the legacies of Solidarity and

Catholicism, to the newly conceptualized ethnic or cultural trajectory of the “secular left” to which particular positionality of the Polish Jews has been crucial.

The fall of socialism marked the arrival of transnational gender discourses and donors into the region. Since the 1994 the European Union most visibly represents the globalizing processes in the region. The arrival of the EU intersected with both: the newly emerged identification of Polish feminisms with western, liberal feminism and NGOization and cooptation of women’s movements-processes characteristic to so called post-Beijing processes. Chapter Two of my dissertation explores the emergence of the western-identified feminism that dominated the Polish women’ movement between 1995 and 2000. The way women expressed their commitment and affiliation to western ideas appears in my research a number of times:

My feminism is liberal feminism. I mean it is a feminism of equality rather than difference. I’m closer to Betty Friedan then Sara Ruddick ...(r3)

Polish women with their history and current problems are closer to Western Europe, more than for example to Russia or Ukraine (NWP10)

The identification with the western liberal feminism, the processes of pre- and post-Beijing mobilization and EU accession, has been coinciding with the emergence of professional feminism. The new type of “activism as a job” has been a direct consequence of the arrival of US and EU money to post-socialist countries, and as such has been an instantiation of the process of NGOization of feminism in the region. Asked to elaborate on her feminist trajectory, Ania described women of her age as the first cohort of “professional” feminists. For this group of women the involvement in “the movement” started in the late 1990s when the feminist mobilization was out of its

“grassroots” phase and feminist NGOs became the headquarters of feminist organizing.

In 1997 Ania answered a job ad for a position in an emerging feminist NGOs, OSKa:

I was looking for a job. I always wanted to work in a feminist organization. I applied for a position of a director, and landed a position of a publishing project coordinator (r23).

The Women’s Information Center, OSKa, where Ania still worked in 2006, has been a beacon of feminism in Poland for many years and become the site of a variety of feminist initiatives from publishing to policymaking, from consciousness rising groups to EU lobbying, from art and literature meetings to facilitating the exchange between organizations working locally, nationally and globally.

Within the recent history of Polish feminism, OSKa holds a very special, symbolic position, and its transformations between 1997-2006 can be seen as symptomatic of the path that feminism and feminists have been taking over the last two decades. It started as a continuation of a local project that intersected with the arrival of Western donors. OSKa represented the post- Beijing process of stabilization and NGOization of the feminist movement. Later on OSKa became a crucial venue of the generational struggle. Some, especially older feminists identified the 2000-2001 conflict in OSKa as “the moment when younger generation of women “took over”, as a crucial generational shift in Polish feminism (Limanowska 2008). These generational shifts crucial to the 2000s transformations of the Polish feminist movement are the subject of Chapter Three of this dissertation. In 2000, in the time marked by a wave of rejection of the “institutional” feminism, Ania became part of the two of the informal women’s groups that somewhat emerged directly from OSKa. In 2000 she co-founded the Sisterhood Street -- the groups that organizes feminist camps in Poland. In March 2001, Ania, as an 8 March Alliance member, co-organized the first street demonstration

celebrating the International Women's Day in Warsaw. Her work in the Alliance varied significantly from her duties at OSKa. This new form of activism was specifically geared at building upon the differences and varieties of feminist backgrounds of its members. A definition of the gender social justice represented by informal women's organizations is wider; yet, it is more specific than the one often presented by NGOs because it embeds more a hybrid identity that combines the strategic use of various discursive tools with the critique of the institutional feminism and openness to various women's points of views informal women's groups. Young activists' was to avoid falling into hegemonic discourses of the institutionalized feminism, moving away from hidden power hierarchies that the professional activism was producing, and embracing the values of solidarity between various groups of women. Informal groups made the broadening of the feminist discourse and attracting non-middle class, rural and working class to feminism their major political goal.

Multidimensionality and the overlapping character of a variety of strategies, discourses and narratives is crucial to this new political culture model of Polish feminism. For instance, while younger women more often utilize informal venues of the public space to produce counter-hegemonies and challenge social injustices, they many times cherish personal attachments to the women's NGOs. Ania again is a good example of such complex affiliations. At the same time as she was engaged in the informal activism, she became a director of OSKa; one of the most prominent women's NGOs in Poland, with the permanent funding, institutional hierarchy and employees. . She argued that although her identities as an NGOs leader and activist overlap, they are attached to

different registers of being a feminist. For instance, as a leader of the NGO she was often involved in the dialogue with the state, with various donors and international institutions:

I always evaluate the activities from the perspective of the person who for number of years has been involved in the institutionalized nongovernmental movement. So I look from the institutionalized perspective (r23)

Although she strategically chose to exercise her feminism through impacting the „mainstream” politics, her „private” definitions of feminist activism and specificity of Polish feminism is much broader:

But for me (feminism in Poland) is very diverse and it grew a lot over the last years. It is diverse because on one hand it has institutionalized forms, which means it found its identity within the non-governmental organizations such as OSKa, EFKa, and all the others. On the other hand however it is represented vibrantly in the non institutionalized forms, which often are recurring, such as Manifa organized since 2000 or the feminist camps organized by Sisterhood Street. Then on the other hand there is academic dimension, which means more and more people does feminism within gender studies, at the academy, teaching. But I'm not sure since I would say that what is characteristic to Polish feminism is more activism and the lack of theory (r23)

The new subjectivities emerging at the intersections of the transnational discourses and local legacies are the subject of Chapters Four and Five of this dissertation. In Part Two of this work, I attempt to see Polish feminism through the lenses of the feminist debates on difference, representation and location. The major point of inquiry is to examine whether categories utilized within the current conceptualizations of postcolonial and transnational theory can be applied to the post-socialist context. Or do we need a new theoretical framework to grasp the specificity of processes that take place in the region?

In Chapters Four and Five I specifically explore border, hybrid identities of Catholic Feminists and lesbian and Jewish feminists and ask how transnational discourses intersect with local narratives to produce new feminist identities that are simultaneously rooted in the post-socialist context and transnational feminist struggles. Chapter Four examines the emergence of the Catholic feminist identities at the intersection of the feminist discourses that draw from the tradition of secular feminism and the individual religious commitments to Catholicism experienced by some Polish feminists. This chapter interrogates how Catholic feminists are represented and represent themselves within the broader narrative of Polish feminism. Chapter Five asks how the internationally prominent discourses of sexual rights translate into the Polish context. I look at the emergence of new sexual minorities' identities that simultaneously refer to the transnational human rights discourses and employ the idea of the "stranger" historically represented by Polish Jews.

While over the last 20 years Polish feminism turned the "full circle" and it's back into the question of abortion rights, the final concluding chapter of this dissertation looks at the new levels at which the debate over women's reproductive choices take place and new strategies that emerge around the same old question: Is there a feminist movement in Poland? OSKa became an incubator of another feminist foundation "Feminoteka" that nowadays serves as a forum for "ideological" exchanges between and among younger and older feminists. Although the intellectual and ideological debates were very important for the first stage of feminism (worth mentioning here are articles on the condition of Polish feminism published by the Krakow-based journal ZADRA in 1994 and 1996), they had not been the major focus of feminism until a recent debate between

liberal and socialist feminism. Feminists disappointed with the liberal government policies on women, and a growing number of feminist alliances with trade union activists and leftist groups such as “Krytyka Polityczna”, have been intersecting with and moving away from the western liberal-oriented identity towards re-rooting feminist activism in the pre-war secular leftist tradition, known predominantly as fighting Anti-Semitic tendencies in Polish culture and politics. The new “ideological” shifts in feminist discourse on Poland are the subjects of this dissertation’s conclusions. They mark, I argue, the transformation of feminists identities toward impacting the broader political culture and redefining women’s and minorities’ issues as matters of the whole nation.

Final, concluding chapter of my dissertation also asks what social movement is and how we can conceptualize feminism as a movement in the context of post-socialism. The recent return of the abortion debate to broader public, in the case of the 14 years old Agata, revealed a significant shift of the mainstream media and public opinion toward the feminist positions. However, the massive support that Agata has received from media and government in her struggle for legal abortion did not translate to a mass women’s mobilization for changing the Polish law. Unlike many Polish feminist activists, for whom this lack of the mass mobilization indicates the failure of the feminism altogether, I argue in this chapter that scattered and fragmented mobilizations that cut through the generations, ideologies and institutions, and impact the politics from margins, require the paradigm shift in our understanding of social movement. Given the fragmentation of the feminist mobilizations in Poland, the effectiveness, visibility and progress of the movement cannot be evaluated within the paradigm of the mass social movement. This paradigm, I believe, we need to reconceptualize by taking into account the scattered

social mobilizations characteristic to the post-socialist context, multiple sources of power, hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses as well as diverse methods of enacting power, defining power and approaching the power.

One of the crucial elements responsible for the diverse character of Polish feminism is its condensation in time. Many of my interviewees have argued that in comparison to other locations, the Second World has been experiencing the fast line of feminism -- generations, ideologies and institutions that have been developing over a long period of time elsewhere have been fast-forwarded in the context of post-socialism. The multiplicity of feminisms, the variety of the layers of feminist activism in Poland make measuring the effectiveness, success and progress of the movement particularly complicated. They require a model sensitive not only to particular genealogy of the movement but also its current versatility. The success of social struggles that Polish feminist are involved with thus cannot be evaluated by one set of criteria, such as, for instance, policy outcomes. Rather they have to be seen through the lenses of the possibility to destabilize, renegotiate, transform and impact the political culture from the margins.

There is a number of questions crucial to the post-socialist context that my dissertation does not tackle. Can Polish case be generalized to make statements about the whole region? What are similarities and differences within the post-socialist countries? One of physical and psychological boundaries emerging in the region since late 1990s is the division into the “more European” countries of the European Union, and “less European” post-Soviet states such as Ukraine or Georgia. How does the presence of the

EU impacts the regional solidarity and its representation within the transnational feminisms?

Another gap easily identified by the reader familiar with the context is that of the socialist period. While I was able to reach women who were active in Solidarity movement during and after socialism, my research has never led to a contact with those women who were involved in the mainstream women's movement under socialism. Even though many of my interviewees and scholars in the region argue that we cannot consider Polish feminism an instance of the "real" social mobilization or social movement we know that there has been a number of women active at the local, national and transnational public debates on gender.

Finally any attempt to put the Second World context in dialogue with postcolonial theories inevitable meets serious doubts. One of them is the question of "race". While "ethnicity" plays an important role in the formation of the feminist identities in countries such Croatia, Serbia and Romania, the idea of race and ethnic identity is less often conceptualized in the context of the seemingly homogenous countries, such as Poland. Can we apply the "racial" discourses into the context in which religion and culture are, more often than the color of the skin, the markers of one's race and ethnicity?

Interrogating accepted belief, challenging shared assumptions, and reframing research questions are characteristics of feminist inquiry regardless of specialization (Hawkesworth, 1989:4)

Activist projects seek to unearth, interrupt and open new frames for intellectual and political theory and change. Researchers critique what seems natural, spin images of what's possible, and engage in questions of how to move from here to there' (Fine 1989, 220).

Methodology of the study-towards the fragmented feminist epistemology

Every feminist research project is both a scientific and a social endeavor as it combines aspects of feminist knowledge production and feminist politics. This research draws from two major methodological approaches that challenge the traditional scientific claim to objective and neutral analysis: grounded theory, introduced by Glaser and Strauss (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Strauss 1987) and feminists debates over standpoint theory. It uses the multidisciplinary methods of feminist storytelling, ethnography, and discourse analysis to study of the formation of Polish feminist identities; individual and collective (Disch 1994, Gluck and Patai 1990, Hemmings 2002, Stone-Mediatore 2003, Taylor 1998).

Simultaneously, as an instance of activist research, my project builds on four aspects of feminist methodology: 1.) the centrality of women's situated and lived experience, 2.) the positionality of the researcher within the research community, 3.) the (power) relationships between the researcher and research subjects and 4.) the political character of the knowledge production process.

Unlike the traditional model of social science, grounded theory stresses the importance of the theory of action as it enables the researcher to combine various steps of the research, such as sampling, transcribing, and interpretation as integral elements of generating theory. Grounded theory allows for the fact the theories are generated during preliminary analysis, expanded upon or revised in the field, and they continue to evolve throughout the process of research & analysis. Theories are not static and grounded theory allows for the dynamism/flow of knowledge. Glaser conceptualizes the theoretical sensitivity of the researcher as the ability to develop expertise and experience through insight into the research situation (Glaser 1978). Researcher's positionality is seen here as a creative aspect of the research rather than the obstacle towards the objectivity or neutrality of research outcomes.

Similarly in the heart of the feminist epistemology lies a critique of scientific objectivity; feminist scholars have been destabilizing and challenging the natural science dogmas and the social science assumptions based on the dominant, but false claim of neutrality (Fonow and Cook 1986, Harding 1986, 1987 Reinhartz 1992). They argued that both the researcher's social location as along with a society's dominant norms and values deform the "objectivity" of the data obtained within the research process as well as during data analysis. Moreover, they note that for the majority of time, social science has been centering men's experience as universal. Feminist methodologists propose to focus on women's experiences in various aspects: 1.) the inclusion of women into the research process at the level of sample development, 2.) an increase of the number of women working as a researchers (feminists empiricism), and 3.) the incorporation of women's experiences as valuable perspectives in research analysis (feminist standpoint) (Harding

1986, Reinharz 1992).

My methodological approach draws from both grounded theory and feminist's critiques of scientific objectivity. In particular, it is rooted in the feminist debate over the utility of the category of "identity" in feminist theory and practice. This debate has been at the center of feminist conceptualizations of the standpoint theory and various conceptions of "lived" or "situated" experience (Haraway 1988, Harding 1993, Grant 1993, Mohanty 2000, Moya 2001). Within this debate many scholars have pointed to the ambivalent resonance of "identity" within women's and gender studies: while on the one hand feminist researchers often times claim the diversity of women's experiences and identities; on the other, during data collection and its analysis, we assume the unity of women's standpoints. While the critiques of a universal women's standpoint, particularly postmodernist critiques, have been pointing to the drawbacks of utilizing "identity" as a category of feminist inquiry, postcolonial and Third World women scholars argue for keeping the concept intact as representations of contextualized women's experience rooted in the material reality of women's lives.

Early formulations of standpoint theory conceptualized women's experiences as an a-historical, universal, epistemological, methodological, and political tool deriving from gender differences and responsible for distinctive ways of knowing (Harding 1987 and 1993, Hartsock 1987, Smith 1987). "Female" or "feminine" experience of gender served here as a recourse that allows one to formulate epistemological assumptions and political goals (Grand 2001). Those Marxist inspired standpoint theories focused on the social construction of the women's experiences, its relation to the body politics, rather than see it as a direct consequence of female body. They conceptualized the "difference"

represented by women's experience as a result of the sexual division of labor and emphasized the dual positionality of women's experiences; its centrality and marginality in the social structure (Hartsock 1987) Having access to both spheres of human life, production, and reproduction as well as experiencing the social and political hierarchy from the bottom, standpoint theorists are seen as enabling women to grasp aspects of the social structure (Smith 1987).

Various formulations of standpoint theory have become a paradigm of feminist research and politics. As a guiding methodological perspective, standpoint theory has been used in feminist social sciences and politics. Standpoint theory assumes that women share collective experiences that give them better insight into a social "reality" and has also become a foundation for "identity politics" in feminist activism. However, such notions of universal women's "experience" have been vulnerable to many critiques, two of them include: the postmodern critique of a fixed identity and the postcolonial critique of the universal and homogenous women's experience, women's standpoint theory being the most influential. Postmodern assessments of standpoint draw from the work of Joan Scott who asserts that these are not individuals who have experiences but subjects who are constituted through these experiences (Scott 1992). Postmodernist feminists argue that individuals and groups are not prior to their experience thus cannot be considered as a point of departure of the conceptualization of the notion of experience and identity. On the contrary, postmodernists argue, we should look at the way in which "experience" itself is constituted through variety of discourses and social practices. Drawing on Nietzsche, Judith Butler argues: "there is no gender identity behind expressions of gender, that identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to

be its results” (Butler 1990). While early versions of standpoint theory constructed “identity” as representing the “essential” women’s subjectivity, postmodernism claims that identity is a purely social construct. In such conceptualization “identities” are not simply given, they are created, produced, and reproduced by the dominant narratives (Butler 1990). As individual and collective identities are “performed” within or outside the given context, they are detached from the materiality of women’s experience and thus unstable, shifting, and contradictory.

Post-positivist research methodology proposed by feminist scholars in postcolonial context points to the dead end of both “identity politics” and postmodernist approaches to women’s experience (Moya 1997, Moya 2001, 2002, Mohanty 2003). In these views, one of the crucial limitations of both essentialist and postmodern positions is that they make it impossible to talk about the “real”, but different experiences of women, for instance, the experiences of third-world women, who are most severely effected by the globalization processes (Mohanty 2003). Chandra Mohanty argues "critique of essentialist identity politics and the hegemony of the postmodern skepticism about identity [that] has led to a narrowing of feminist politics” (2003:6). In Mohanty’s view Postmodern feminist theory and practice claim that to use women’s identity as a category of feminist inquiry is either naive or irrelevant. The very concept of identity, they claim cannot be neither the source of knowledge nor the ground for social and political mobilization. According to Mohanty postmodern approaches to “identity” also delegitimize all accounts of the materiality of experience, all forms of identity that are recognized as enacting “silent violence” (Scott 1992). The post-positivist approach calls for an analysis of the ways in which material realities and materiality of women’s lives within the socioeconomic and geopolitical

context shape their feminist identities (Reagon 2000, Mohanty 2000, Moya 1997, Moya, 2002, Skeggs 1997). The post-positivist paradigm draws our attention not only to the significance of the location of certain groups of women: both in terms of their socio-economic status and geopolitical location, but it also points to the situated character of the knowledge production processes. In this approach both women's identities as research subjects and researchers are shaped by the relationship with their material realities and materiality of their everyday experience (Mohanty 2003). The dilemmas surrounding the location of the research subjects and researcher, their relation to each other as well as political content of the research are crucial to feminist methodology.

Centering experiences of Polish women's

My research focuses on Polish feminist identity formation is both a "lived experience" and "situated knowledge" endeavor. This study of the formation of feminist subjectivities challenges the possibility of achieving objective and universal truth and knowledge as it aims at exploring the process of identity formation through and examination and analysis of specific, fragmented, and contextualized knowledge of certain groups of people (Haraway 1988). While I recognize the efforts of postcolonial feminists to reclaim the concept of identity by introducing post-positivist methods (Mohanty 2003, Moya 1997), I argue that lived experiences constitute subjectivities at both the individual and the collective levels. I share the urge to recognize the multiplicity of women's experiences and standpoints without having to destabilize the category of "women" as such (Grant 1993, Mohanty 2003). The major objective of my project was to explore how the changing conditions of women's lives and the transformations of their material reality contribute to the formation, questioning, and destabilization of the "fixed" identities of

Polish feminists: as women, Poles, and feminists. I asked how these identities have been transforming, and how women reconstruct them. What are the trajectories of feminist identities in Poland? How are the “new” feminists subjects that claim fluidity, flexibility, and ambivalence rooted in the material realities of gender, nation and transnationality?

I have conducted this research between 2005-2008 in four stages: 1) collection of 35 narratives, 2) participant observation, 3) textual analysis of interviews, and 4) follow up and writing of the results. While each stage has a distinctive focus, the implementation of these stages does overlap in time. Stage One (March 2005-December 2006) involved fieldwork in Poland, sample selection, conducting 35 taped interviews, and preliminary analysis. After the preliminary fieldwork in Poland (March- August 2005). I have selected my feminist subjects based upon the following criteria: 1) the geographical scope of organization or individual activities (local, national, regional, and international) and 2) self identification as a feminist or feminist organization. I have selected three groups of women for interviews: 1) members of non-governmental women’s organizations, 2) members of informal women’s groups, and 3) academics, journalists and writers active as feminists within the Polish public sphere. In the number of cases the identities of my respondents overlapped: many of them are at the same time engaged in the work of informal groups and academic endeavors, some combine their job at the feminist NGOs with the informal activism. Others finally are doing it all: are at the same time NGOs, employees, informal groups activists and academic. For some of my respondents their work as feminists involves political party engagements. I have included them in the sample, I have however decided to not include those women’s activists for which party politics was a single venue for the expression of their feminism.

In majority of my cases it was impossible to explore feminist identity of the respondent as single layered. For instance among my interviewees there are no women who describe themselves solely in terms of Jewish feminism, street feminism, or liberal feminism. The analysis of such multilayered identities has to take such diversity into account. In this dissertation I do use the descriptive terms such as NGOs feminist, young feminist, Catholic feminists, Jewish feminist, liberal and socialist feminist with caution, tentatively. Already at the early stage of collecting my data I had to give up on the goal of creating a qualitative typology of feminist identities, indicating the number of feminists within various categories, such as age, class and sexual orientation. From very early on the question of how can we “measure” the content of one’s identity became crucial to this work. How, for instance can we classify a woman, who is in the long- term relationship with another woman, but refuses to identify as a lesbian? If that woman goes to Church every Sunday, but remains in the lesbian relationship, can we call her Catholic? Or to take another example, how do we conceptualize the Jewish identity from contradictory statements of Jewish feminists: one arguing that it is an ethnic identity, another opting for rooting Jewishness in a historical narrative. And finally how can we classify a woman who during the course of the interview claims that her feminism is a liberal feminism, but later on reveals that she is deeply committed to the leftist group? Throughout the course of my research I decided to use identity markers, more as a way to explore the meaning of the identities themselves, rather than a number of women who associate themselves with certain identity. They thus served rather as tools to illuminate the complex interplay of various narratives, histories and positionalities than *types* of feminist identities.

The interview scenario that I have used was based on open-ended questions, which

were designed to grasp women's experiences as defined by the respondents. Each conversation was directed towards eliciting concrete and contextualized narratives, allowing respondents to describe the relevance and importance of particular events and circumstances to the formation of their individual feminists trajectory. The scenario I used deployed a flexible topic guide that was organized along several thematic fields: 1) the story of individual's engagement in the movement, 2) the role of (private, family, national, regional) history in shaping the individual's path to feminism, 3) the role of the geopolitical context in shaping current activism, 4) debates, activities and strategies in which the individual is currently involved, and 5) the relevance of international women's activism, particularly activism at the European Union (EU) level to individual's experience.

Stage Two (May 2006-September 2006) consisted of selection of the organization for the case study and conducting in-depth participant observation in the Women's Information Center (OSKa) in Warsaw, Poland. Participant observation was a part of the OSKa case study, which aimed at providing insight into the current debates engaging Polish feminists as well as sources of disagreements and conflicts within the feminist community. During the preliminary fieldwork in Poland, OSKa was chosen as the case study, because of their status as the biggest and most active feminist organization in Poland. Participant observation conducted in OSKa aimed at examining several aspects of the organizations' work. In particular, I examined OSKa as: 1) a platform of feminist discussion (OSKa moderated feminist internet groups and published monthly feminist "Calendar"), 2) a facilitator of activism (it provides a space for work of the informal feminist groups), 3) a leader of the Polish Women's Lobby (which is a part of the

European Women's Lobby at the EU level) and 4) an active participant of the mainstream public sphere (OSKa developed and maintains contacts with media, politicians and non-women NGOs). During participant observation, I collected data through: the study of daily activities of OSKa; participation in Internet networks; collection of documents published by OSKa and other related organizations; attendance of formal and informal meetings; and maintaining of the field notes. I have used this material mostly in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

Stage Three (October 2006-October 2007) involved two sets of activities. First, the collection of documents to examine ways in which feminist attempted to impact the broader public. The documents included: 1) publications and reports, 2) press releases and media articles, 3) newsletters and leaflets, and 4) Internet articles, posts and essays. I have focused on the mainstream and feminists materials on the subjects of feminism itself, my documents included: NGOs publications: bulletins, newsletters, website information and media articles. I have articles accompanied particular events such as Equality Parade or Manifa's well as essays and interviews written by feminists in various sections of the popular daily and weekly: "Gazeta Wyborcza" and "Polityka". Finally, I have followed information published at two feminists internet portals: OSKa-www.oska.org.pl (until 2006) and Feminoteka-www.feminoteka.pl (between 2006-2009). I have conducted textual analysis of the collected materials. I then put them in dialogue with the interview' transcripts in order to specify major trajectories, topics, debates, and themes that would serve as a foundation for my dissertation outline.

Stage Four (November 2007-March 2009) Follow up and writing. Within this stage I have conducted additional interviews with the previously interviewed subjects. I

have also set up a few new interviews with women whose stories I have identified as crucial for my dissertation based upon the analysis of the previously gathered narratives. Writing of the dissertation has also become a crucial part of the research process, as I have had a chance to give back the ideas and analysis outcome to the feminist community in Poland, in forms of informal conversation, seminar that I'm teaching at the Gender Studies at Warsaw University and articles that I have written and that I am planning to write. At this stage, although I did not conduct any more interviews, I have continued to follow the construction feminist identities in Poland, as a friend, activist, and a teacher.

Location of the Researcher: Outsider-Insider dilemma

Conducting this research was in many ways an act of the personal passion and engagement. Few researchers have used the idea of “lived experience” in the post-socialist context (Baer 2003, Mizielska 2008). An important goal of my research was to move away from the existing research in post-socialist context that focus on trying to match women's experiences with existing theories. I was curious how a “situated knowledge” approached Third World based conceptions of the “lived experience” would translate into a new context. I wanted to make my research subjects speak for themselves and identify elements important to their experiences without imposing my research agenda on them. Such objectives, however, required constant examination of my positionality within this project and reflexivity on the relation between me and my research subjects. The feminist methodological turn from research “on” women to the research “with” or “for” women calls for researcher's reflexivity at all stages of the process (choosing a research subject, conducting interviews, analysis, writing) (Wolf 1996). Feminist scholars have argued that the researcher's positionality is crucial to the

knowledge that has been produced and as researcher are inevitable agents of the terrain that has been mapped (Lather 1988, Haraway 1988). Sulamith Reinhartz argues: ‘before you can expect to hear anything worth hearing, you have to examine the power dynamics of the space and the social actors... We have to study who we are and who we are in relation to those we study’ (Reinhartz 1988, as cited in Fine 1992, 215). In addition, feminist’s “situated knowledge” approaches pointed to limitations that the researcher’s positionality poses to the “objectivity” of the research outcomes, and argued that all knowledge is “marked knowledge” that reproduces maps of consciousness reflecting various categories of the gender, class, race, and nationality of the researcher (Grabowska, Regulska 2008)

Bringing the researcher’s positionality into a study raises serious identity related questions, which was also the case during my research. Being simultaneously involved in the Polish feminists movement and western academy raised questions about the multi dimensionality of my positionality, including the ways in which my mobile status impacted both my research agenda and the emotions. Sympathy and disbelief as well as excitement and boredom have been impacting my positionality throughout this project. I asked myself to what extent am I one of my subjects, do I identify with them? To what extent are they different from me and am I different from them? Was I living and experiencing their reality as a researcher and second world woman, a Polish feminist? Can I get rid of my ideological assumptions, some of them being shaped by the US Ph.D. program? And more importantly did I want to get rid of them? I asked how do I represent myself in my fieldwork, what are my research and political agendas, my multidimensional locations and in what way do they impact the knowledge that will be

produced within my study? These questions daunted me when I interviewed my friends, coworkers, along with the founders and members of the Sisterhood Street of which I have been part. I realized that my positionality as an insider/ outsider within the feminist community allowed me access to certain information, while obscuring other areas of women's lives. As an insider I have been utilizing my positionality as a friend, former coworker, employee, or volunteer. As a US based PhD student, I have been establishing certain kind of intellectual authority, I have represented myself as an "expert" in both transnational and US feminism, to which many of my interviewees referred.

Researcher-research subject relationship (reflexivity)

Those issues of the researcher's positionality are closely related to the questions of the politics of representation and epistemic responsibility: who is speaking for whom and with what legitimacy (not just with respect to the interviewees but also ourselves). Within my research I had to ask myself how I represent women's experiences, standpoints and interests within the research practice? How do I evaluate my interviewee's trajectories, political activism, and intellectual arguments. To what extent do I filter their narratives through my own? And finally how did the situation of the interview impact the knowledge that was produced? Feminist methodologists conceptualize interviews as situated encounters, which generate situated, partial knowledge. Within these situations, the researcher is a co-producer of knowledge, rather than an agent who uncovers preexisting meanings (Reinharzt 1983). Two aspects of my relationship with the interviewees became crucial to me in this context: the possibility of an unequal power relationship and the question of the impact of the personal relationships on the research outcomes.

There are a number of strategies to avoid the unequal power relationship between the researcher and research subjects and to empower the interviewee in the research situation. In my research, I decided to choose less intimidating venues for the interview; I avoided office interviews and asked my subjects to meet at their house, a café, or in the park. In addition, I used open-ended questions, which let my respondents have a sense of sharing the control over their conversation. At the same time I did not stay quiet – I entered the conversation, voiced my own opinions, shared information, and asked additional questions. I made an effort to express interests in my subject's work, by attending the events in which they participate and coordinate, as well as by joining in social events. In this sense, my research exemplified participatory action research¹, even though the oral narratives have been the major sources of the data included in this dissertation.

Such a strategy gave me insight into the hidden layers of my respondents' experiences. Many times during my fieldwork I had a feeling that I gained an access to the membrane of the movement, as personal relationships, emotions, and attachments to the movement goals were becoming part of my own experience. But such privileged access to the “private” level of feminist activism in Poland also posed some crucial ethical challenges. I asked myself how much I could get involved with people I was interviewing. When does being close become too close and create a situation in which personal intimate information has been revealed? Was I in a position to use information shared with me within an informal context? For instance, a couple of my respondents shared stories about their intimate relationships with men and women and ways in which

¹ Being an active participant of the OSKa's daily activities, public meetings and private gatherings I have enacted some of the PAR's principles.

these relationship impacted their feminism. Some revealed information about their reproductive plans and fears about how their feminist bosses will react to them. Others revealed personal stories of friendship and betrayal with their feminist mentors, friends, and co-workers. Was I in the position to include such stories in my writing? To write them down was to reveal, what has been silenced within the movement – to show lines of conflict, resentment, and animosity. The question of research ethics has become central to my experience of interviewing women with whom I have been friends with and with whom I have worked in the past at OSKa between 2000 and 2002. With some of the women I have been later involved in creating Ulica Siostrzana, an informal feminist group, which work I explore in Chapter Three of this dissertation. Since our conversations were often time very personal, I wondered when the intellectual inquiry becomes gossiping, and where is the line between private matters and feminist politics. I asked, following Dahpne Patai, if social research is ever ethical and I inevitably ended up giving myself a negative answer (Patai 1991 p.25). My response to unequal power relationships, one of the crucial elements of the researcher-research subject relationship, has been informed by Judith Stacey's employment of friendship as a way to confront exploitation within the research process (Stacey 1988). Eventually I have decided not to reveal unnecessary details, even if they would make an interesting theoretical argument.

Entering a personal level relationship with my research subjects was, to some extent, a strategy that I have chosen to play while constantly examining the ways in which their and my experiences were similar and different. I asked myself how these similarities and differences impact the trajectory of this research, the ways and direction in which my initial assumptions and research goals transformed. While we were all

situated within the Second World context (my respondents almost always acknowledged me as a part of this context) I was simultaneously the one who was bringing up the question of the Third World, one that has been not only rarely asked in the context of the Second World. Often times the relationship between Second and Third World was an issue that my respondents never thought about: either they did not consider it important, or they did not seem to see a necessity to reflect on it. Was I imposing certain framework on them?

On the other hand, the question of the relationship with the First, “western” world has become an issue. While many of my respondents praised their identification with western liberal feminism, they also perceived me as sharing their sympathy for liberal feminist views, simply because I was studying in the US. Introducing barely discussed questions of Third World women’s critiques of “western imperialism” was a very complicated matter in such context. As part of my research agenda was to get to know why it has been so often dismissed as irrelevant, I realized that in the context of post-socialism the question of transnational feminism has to be tackled from various angles. Instead of raising the question of the Third World I started inquiring about the meaning of geography and regional feminist identity, religion, Polishness, and women’s relationships with western feminist thought. This experience led to a major shift within the project: instead of a dissertation on transnational feminism I end up getting involved in a more genealogical endeavor, the purpose of which was to unravel layers of feminist identities both individual and collective. I realized that only through the reconstruction of these experiences could I comprehend public processes, particularly one that interested me the most – the transnational feminism project.

What participants tell us depends very much on who we are, what they know about us and how they perceive the relevance of their knowledge. Another area in which the encounters with my interviewees have led to the redefinition of my project's objectives was the question of the European Union. Even though the EU has been an important part of my research proposal, my interviewees rarely wanted to talk about it, and my early interviews quickly shifted to more personal stories of feminism, rather than assessment of the EU policies. Many of my interviewees dismissed the question of the EU: they argued that they are not experts in EU matters, or simply refused to form an opinion saying, "I have no idea about the EU", "Nothing changed since the EU" or "the EU has no impact on my feminism". As I have had an experience of working within an EU focused project, I knew that the lack of knowledge about the Union is not the case. Was the fact that I was coming back, and some of my interviewees have been interviewed for the previous project a factor? Or was it the informality of my research that made women unwilling to talk about the "boring", more professional, less emotional aspect of their feminism. Or maybe for some of my respondents really disengaged with the EU concept because of "foreign" implications that didn't fit into the "Polish feminism" project that I interviewed them for now? I kept wondering if I will have to abandon, important from my point of view institutionalized aspect of the feminism, and eventually decided to put together the material that I have managed to gather within my project with the data we have gathered within the NSF founded project *Constructing Supranational Political Spaces: The European Union, Eastern Enlargement and Women's Agency*². In this dissertation

² This NSF founded projects led by Prof. Joanna Regulska, I was involved in between 2002-2006. Within this US, Czech and Polish collaboration, in Poland we have collected 30 interviews with representatives of the NGOs, 10 interviews with Polish politicians. WE have also interviewed 30 EU representatives in Brussels and conducted 3 rounds of focus groups with NGOs leaders in Poland.

the quotations from the NSF project interviews are marked: (NWP, no.)

Many feminist scholars argued that the power dynamics within the research process are present at every stage starting from an unequal exchange, exploitation (on both sides) during the fieldwork, through the power inclined in the post-fieldwork process of interpretation and analysis to writing process as raising serious questions about representation (Davies 2004, DeVault 1999, Hemmings 2002, Lal 1996, Wolf 1996). Writing, as much as fieldwork, has to be recognized as a crucial part of the research process, one in which the process of representation is particularly important. The meaning of the research process is constructed within the writing process and the data reveal its new angle for the researcher. In my case the material that I have gathered emerged not as much as knowledge, which I had to organize and represent but rather as narratives in which I can involve in a discussion and dialogue.

Activist research practice

All feminist research is a political endeavor, some scholars are even arguing that what makes the research *feminist* is the political agenda and dedication to social change (Reinhartz). As an adjective *feminist* denotes the rejection of the “status quo”, the aim of feminist scholarship should not only be to open up scientific discourses for new research venues and research questions, but also to aim at specific outcomes such as education of policy makers or illumination of the effects of certain discriminatory social practices such as violence or empowerment of women. A commitment to political change beyond the academy requires that researchers ‘speak across worlds, play multiple roles, and communicate in more than one language’ (Mountz 2002, 187).

Historically the distinction between abstract theoretical, “scientific” and the

“applied” social science has denoted the hierarchy within the academy (Reinhartz 1992). On the one hand, applied studies-derivative, polemic, and politically charged research was considered not “neutral” and “objective” and thus not scientifically significant. On the other hand, the production of “high theory” separated from the social praxis has been reserved for men (Reinhartz 1992). Today, as feminists and researchers, we aim at producing analyses that can be utilized not only within the academy, but evaluated by multiple audiences in various geopolitical locations (Nagar 2002, 185). We not only want to create theory but we also want ‘to give a better-theorized account of concrete historical reality’ (Hall 1988 as cited in Nagar 2002, 184)

The use of feminist methodology implies then a commitment to the empowerment of women and social change. Social change generated by feminist scholarship can occur at various stages of research: during research as a process of consciousness raising of the participants or after research results have been published. Sensitivity to the researcher-research subjects’ relationship is one aspect of the political character of feminist research. Participatory, collaborative, passionate research allow includes research subjects into the knowledge generating activities at various stages: during the data collection, formulation of the hypothesis and writing researchers are actively looking for subjects feedback and contribution. They thus becomes a “coauthors” of research, agents whose input matters in the final outcomes of the research. On the other hand, communal engagement of the feminist research, which is often based upon the rejection of the hierarchy of people and ideas requires times as data are being gathered in a democratic and interactive process. One of the pitfalls of such methodology, however, is the hardship of ending, while the experience of the interaction transforms and empowers both a research and her subjects,

the data may never reach the last stage of process - writing up and publishing. As I considered my work an activist research project I asked myself how it would contribute to social change. What is the ultimate change that my project will produce? As many feminists projects the goal that I had in mind while I was doing mine was political and long-term to end the patriarchy. More narrowly however I wanted to locate Polish feminism within the broader Polish political culture and transnational feminist framework. My aim was to to show how, from Polish feminism, challenges dominant political and feminist discourses from the margins. And finally I was interested in unraveling some of Polish feminisms' specificities, that are in fact the rooted in the culture and in the post-socialist context that made them unique in the transnational feminist conversations- sometimes silenced, but more often reduced to geopolitical clichés.

Every feminist research project is, to certain extent, both a needs assessment and demystification endeavor (Reinhartz 1992). Similar to other needs assessment projects that aim at empowering certain groups of people through an assessment of their experiences and the ways in which these experiences have been represented within the significant narratives, my research aimed at evaluating the positionality of the Second World feminism within a transnational framework. While its does not end with concrete policy recommendations, as is often the case with feminist projects dealing with issues such as violence, trafficking in women or discrimination at the labor market and man, many others, it surely hopes to contribute to the new conceptualizations of the ideas of transnationalism and democracy. Like in case of other de-mystification research the goal of my projects was to bring up under represented groups into the center of the feminist

debate. I believed that introduction of new data, new narratives and new aspects of regional feminisms, can enrich our knowledge of transnational women's movement.

The core idea of "feminist methodology" is that a feminist researcher sees herself not only as an academic, but also as social a activist. For a researcher gathering the new information can also be a life changing experience as it often initiates a personal, intellectual, and political transformation. From that perspective, feminist research practice requires a critical stance towards existing methodologies and theories in her field. On the other hand, the commitment to social and political change has been a hallmark (not only) of feminist research. The role of research imagination, interconnectivity, and dialogue among and between academics, public intellectuals, activists, and policy makers has become more prominent (Appadurai 2000), although this is rarely achieved in research practice.

Part I.

Transformation of the feminist mobilizations.

**Chapter One: Wholesome Girls and Western Pioneers: Post-Communism,
“Solidarity,” and Legacies of European Colonization in Polish Feminist
Genealogies**



My work focuses on a misleadingly easy question, “Is feminism possible after Communism?” On one hand, the answer is obviously “yes”. However, the re-construction of the identity of feminism in the context of Central Eastern European transformation raises the question to what extent what we call “feminism” rests upon and builds on various and often contradictory intellectual traditions, histories and locations. Does a particular geo-political legacy of the region inform the way Polish feminists represent themselves? Or, is the Polish feminist identity mediated through the “Western” feminist thought? In this chapter, I’m not looking for a particular point that would mark *the* beginning of the feminism in Poland. I rather look for various entry points which mark diverse narratives of Polish feminism and bring us to the different roots of the feminist identities: from 1990s abortion debate to the women’s involvement in the Solidarity movement, from partition period through the story of the assimilation of Jews and Polish anti-Semitism. I will thus not provide you with an answer as to when and where exactly the story of feminism begins, but rather locate the points of entry through which feminist identities have been shaped. In that sense, feminism does not have one origin but a multiplicity of “beginnings”. I examine various elements that historically contributed to the way in which feminists represent themselves presently. My aim is to envision how the story of contemporary feminism in Poland unfolds and how various layers of identities build upon one another throughout history.

I follow the Foucauldian method of genealogy understood as the “history of the present”. After Foucault I utilize past as explanatory, but not fully determining the way things are in the present. Genealogy traces present to its origins but considers the later fragmentary and often contradictory. To map out individual and collective genealogies

of feminism, we should, I believe, draw from various orders and narratives that sometimes appear to be unrelated to feminism or/and irrelevant to each other. There is no single story or path that determines one's identity and personal feminist trajectory. Following the idea of genealogy, I believe that one cannot look for "pure" origins, a linear or causal continuity in the story that I attempt to tell. Unexpected and sometimes random combinations of elements that are to be found in personal trajectories are, I think, crucial to disclose the reality of the experiences of feminism in the context of the transforming Central and Eastern European location.

American historian Shana Penn came to Poland in 1992 as one of the "political tourists" who, after 1989, appeared in Central Eastern Europe to conduct research and "discover" the society from behind the "Iron Curtain". Being the student of Czeslaw Milosz, a Polish poet who settled in Berkeley in 1980s, Penn was interested in what the transformation of the world that "has been so far away from American society" can tell her about the struggles of her own country, and how the far-away post-communist reality can impact her understanding of the struggles of the already established democracy "at home" (Penn 2003). Her first trip to the region was devoted to gathering materials for an article on women's leadership in Central and Eastern Europe. She ended up abandoning this project and focused solely on "Solidarity women" who, as she discovered, were actually leading the "Solidarity" movement under the "martial law" (1981-1985) in the face of imprisonment of all male "Solidarity" leaders. After interviewing 12 of those women, Penn concluded that all but one of them completely lacked "gender consciousness". She published her thesis a year later under the title "Solidarity's Secret. Women Who Defeated Communism" in one of the newly

established feminist periodicals, “*Pelny Głos*” (Penn 1993). Although quite radical in its argument, Penn’s story did not get much response in a broader public debate in Poland.

Eight years later, Agnieszka Graff followed Penn’s research by revisiting her conclusions from the position of an insider, that of a Polish opposition-based and US-educated young feminist. Writing her analysis, Graff connected her private trajectory of Catholic upbringing, “Solidarity” involvement, and finally US feminist education with a symbolic narrative of the feminist fate in the traditionally patriarchal society represented by a famous, underground Polish movie “*Sex Mission*.” The plot of the movie is located in the “feminist state”, and it tells the story of a utopian, women-only community. There are no men there as a nuclear catastrophe led to an extinction of “less developed forms of life”. As the story goes, two main characters who are men miraculously awakened from their long-time hibernation are exposed to a number of disempowering and humiliating practices, including a forced sex change, with the goal of converting them into femininity. Finally, however, they manage to survive and by having sex with some fugitives from the “women’s world”, they re-convert the humankind to “normality”.

While originally “*Sex-Mission*” was interpreted as a metaphor of the communist state, the beginning of the nineties brought up new, unnoticed symbolism of the picture; it could be read as a metaphor of deeply patriarchal nature of the Polish culture. In her article “*Patriarchy After Sex Mission*”, Agnieszka Graff used “*Sex Mission*” to explain the Polish transformation as a process of elimination of women from the public sphere (Graff 1999). One of the consequences of people’s alienation from oppressive

communist state, Graff argued, was a destabilization of the traditional male-female dynamic, in which men do politics while women stay home. By degrading the public sphere, Communism brought politics into private homes, and this move, she states, resulted in a “domestication” of the male leadership. The transition to democracy, on the other hand, meant the return to “normality”, which, in the Polish case, equals patriarchy and women’s exclusion from politics (Graff 1999). The process of putting women in “their place” through setting limitation on their reproductive freedom that Graff rightly recognizes in her analysis, was later identified by Teresa Kulawik as a “purification of the Polish nation”(Kulawik 2005).

As she intellectually subscribed to the “Second Wave US feminism”, Graff’s thesis fitted nicely into the argument previously developed by “Western” feminists about the lack of “gender sensitivity” and the absence of “women’s” or “feminist” movement after Communism. By tying these concerns with history of women in “Solidarity”, Graff’s article certainly attempted to approach a more fundamental question that Polish and Western researchers were struggling with at the beginning of 1990s: “Why is there no feminism after Communism?”

At the end of the 1990s, Polish feminism was not however as lacking as Graff saw it. There have been almost 300 organizations active at that time. Several academic units of gender studies were established across the country between 1996-1999. A number of the biggest organizations managed to generate a coalition with women MPs (Parliamentary Women’s Caucus) to connect the civil society sector with politics. What was, however, characteristic for the feminist organizing at that point, and what Graff’s article, clearly though unconsciously represented, was the specific orientation that

dominated the feminist movement. First of all, almost all feminist activities concentrated within the domain of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Funded almost exclusively by Western European and US donors, these organizations represented certain, namely liberal, vision of woman and feminism. They worked hard to separate themselves from the religious and conservative traditions of Polish nationalism and to subscribe to the international conception of women's rights as human rights. Since often times their education about the movement came from there, feminist NGOs activists seemed to be interested to see themselves, as Graff did, more as a part of the trajectory of the "Western" feminist movement, then connecting the experience of feminism to the particular context of women's activism in Poland. Many of them strongly believed that the possibility of establishing the feminist movement in Poland in the context of lack of feminist traditions and resources depends solely on a successful transplantation of "Western" feminist traditions and institutional frameworks into the Polish context (Nowicka 2000). Graff's article published in the popular daily "Gazeta Wyborcza" introduced the wider Polish public into the ongoing debate over the question of accountability and suitability of "Western"-developed categories into the experience of Polish women. "Solidarity" women and some Polish feminist activists argued that the examination of the story of Polish women in activism through a feminist lens, without taking into account the particular, social and political context of their activism, must fail. Anyone who attempts to analyze questions crucial to the identity formation and feminist genealogy in Poland needs to examine how within the experience of transformation the legacies of "Western" feminism, communism and "Solidarity" intersected in the emerging feminist narrative. They need to filter the idea

of “feminism” through women’s experience that is specific to the geopolitical location of the Central and Eastern European region and its history.

So, Is There no Feminism After Communism?

At the age of 27, Natalia, the mother of a two-year old son, the leader of a feminist theater, a journalist and the founder of the women’s foundation that focuses on the rights of mothers in Warsaw, has a history of 14 years involvement in feminist movement:

When I was in the 6th grade, the compulsory religion classes were introduced³. I was too young to go for the demonstration back then, but I refused to go to these classes, and I gave up Catholic religion all together (r7).

When she was “old enough” at the age of 15, Natalia interned at the Amnesty International Poland that conducted campaigns against gender violence in Poland and in China. It was 1995 when Natalia first “got to know about situation of women in various locations and under various political regimes”. That same year she started the first anarcho-feminist organization “Women Against Violence and Discrimination” (currently Emancy-punx) in Poland. She has been active in the Punk-rock music scene, anti-globalist movement and feminism since then. Natalia reckons that in her life, the transformation of the 1990s was crucial since at that moment, the trajectories of feminism, anticlericalism and alter-globalism came together as a response to the newly emerging regime in Poland, one that was simultaneously capitalistic, patriarchal and radical catholic.

³ Catholic religion classes were introduced in 1992 as optional subjects with its alternative “ethic” classes in both elementary and high schools in Poland. Currently Polish government is discussing making religion obligatory with the possibility of choosing it for students’ GRE exams.

For Ewa, the mother of two, the observation of the social change surrounding the increasingly prominent political position of the Catholic Church was also the formative feminist experience:

Of course in the 1980s I was a member of Solidarity, but not very active. At that point I was mainly preoccupied with procreation. But at the end of 80s, and in the 1990 my feminist consciousness started to rise. It was the reaction and resistance to expansion of the Church and its aim to limit women's rights to decide. The first instance of obligatory religion school classes in primary schools. Then there was abortion⁴“(r11)

In March and May 1989, in front of the Parliament building in Warsaw, Ewa attended several demonstrations against the restrictive abortion law (similar protests took place in four other cities in Poland). In 1990, she became a member of the “Neutrum”, The Association for the Neutrality of the State. Two years later, together with the representatives of 20 other organizations across Poland, Ewa established the Federation for Women and Family Planning, a reproductive rights coalition that is the biggest in the

⁴ Abortion was legal in Communist Poland, the 1956 law allowed legal abortion for the “social reasons”. Between 1991-1997 abortion law has been changed several times to finally being accepted in 1997 in its current form. Termination of the pregnancy is possible in three cases; if pregnancy is a result of rape, if women's health and life is in direct danger and if prenatal examination indicates heavy irreversible changes to an embryo.

region, which she directs to this day.



Photo1. “Priests don’t get pregnant” “There is no freedom without freedom of choice”-feminist demonstration in front of Sejm in Warsaw in 1989. At the photo Ola Solik (left) and Wanda Nowicka (center).

In the narrative of Polish feminism, the abortion debate is often recognized as the time when the Polish systemic transformation reached its momentum, the time when standards and limits of the human rights discourse to be used in public space by major political actors were set up for the years to come. The rising position of the Catholic Church in the public sphere intersected with the beginning of the debate over what “values” new Polish democracy would represent. While “Solidarity” and Church established themselves as frontrunners of this debate, feminism became its “pariah”, stigmatized as “foreign” ideology and represented by the slur of “Western bourgeoisie” ideology and “communist legacy”. Reasons why feminists lost the abortion debate had been widely analyzed in feminist literature in Poland and abroad. Most commonly this

failure of Polish feminism is seen in a wider perspective of the impotence of the women's movement altogether. Extensive literature on feminism in post-communist societies persistently asks: "Why there is no feminism after Communism?" (Snitow 1989, Watson 1996, Einhorn, and Sever 2003, Matynia 2003). As Ann Snitow somehow ironically observes, these questions are often followed by an all-well known list of reasons (Snitow 1997): the cancellation of the social security provisions introduced by the socialist state, the decrease of the number of women in central eastern European Parliaments, the growth of nationalism and religious fundamentalism, and the lack of political consciousness among women (Golfdarb 1997, Watson 1993, Snitow 1996, Snitow 2003).

Nevertheless, Natalia and Ewa's stories unravel the consequences of the abortion debate that are rarely considered in such analyses. As the abortion debate paradoxically authorized the existence of feminist identities, it enriched them through the experience of exclusion and alienation that became the foundation for future mobilization. In many ways, as Justyna Wlodarczyk argues, an involvement in the abortion debate translates directly into the emergence of the women's movement itself and the formation of feminist identities (Wlodarczyk 2006). Given the mobilizations such as the one described above and many different ones that took place across the country, I would argue that In Poland, women's deprivation of reproductive rights became an impulse for the emergence of one of the most vibrant and diverse feminist movements in the region. It is a case without precedence in Europe (especially in its Catholic parts, such as Ireland) that the rise of Catholicism provoked the resistance that has become one of the catalysts of the feminist movement (NSF project data 2004). The role of the Catholic Church in the rise of feminist identities is highly peculiar not only because its strengthening in the political

sphere translated directly into feminist mobilization, but also because many of the feminists were Catholic themselves and their Catholic upbringing often became a ground on which they built their feminism. One such a woman, Justyna, explains:

I'm a feminist with the Catholic background; it is very strange. I'm an ex- Catholic, a recovered Catholic, as some people are recovered alcoholics. I was brought up in the very conservative family; very conservative but at the same time very deeply involved in the opposition movement during the communist time, which often came together as you can imagine. I was in the Catholic scouting movement and I was into organizing a lot. I'm a very good organizer and at some point I realized that I'm organizing things that I don't fully agree with. Why do I spend all my strength on organizing sewing or cooking classes for girls? I don't want to cook. I have others things to do (Pennelopes,2000).

In 1997 Slawka Walczewska, an activist and leader of one of the first Polish feminist organizations proposed an alternative and somewhat more contextual explanation as to why in the 1990s feminism failed to enter public discourse, why it became stigmatized by apparently contradictory labels of “bourgeoisie ideology” and “communist legacy”, why this somewhat paradoxical slur made sense in the public debate and distanced women from feminism. She points to the fact that popular explanations of the feminist failure in the abortion debate suffer from a double misunderstanding of the Polish transformation and its effect on the emergence of the feminist movement. Those who argue that there is no feminism after communism appropriated the Western model of feminist movement trajectory into the Central and Eastern European context. While asking why there is no feminism in Poland, they, in fact, ask why there is no Western-like, mass, liberal movement. Furthermore, drawing on official statistics that compare situation of women and women's movement before and after transformation from state socialism to

democracy, they often concluded that Communism was “good” for women. Such conclusion, however, cannot be farther from what Polish feminist themselves think about the previous Communist regime.

The specific positionality of women within the Polish post-communist context can be captured neither by the liberal framework that was often used by proponents of the liberal abortion, nor by its association with Marxism. Liberalism and Marxism fail to “fit” the needs of those women in Poland who positioned themselves both outside the derivative Marxist idea of universal “women’s standpoint” and outside the capitalistic paradigm of “pick and choose”, and who construct their subjectivity around different ideas, such as the idea of solidarity (Gwiazda in Kondratowicz 2001). In other words, both liberal and Marxist traditions are similarly “foreign” to the experience of Polish women’s activism, which is why the “burgouise-marxist-idology” representation successfully shied women away from feminism.

Optimistic visions of western feminists and those who subscribe to the Western model of emancipation assumed that the defense of the right to legal abortion along the lines of the individual autonomy of every woman that worked within the US and West European context, will easily translate to the central and east European context. Because there had been some tradition of the liberal thinking in Central and Eastern Europe, they thought that the ideals of individual freedom for women would be easily transplanted to the Central and Eastern European ground (Funk, 2005). By pushing on liberal framework on non-liberal Central Eastern European context, however, the Western analyses not only failed to capture the experience of women, but they also created a specific discursive framework, within which talking about feminism after communism became impossible.

The failure of the abortion debate and alienation of the feminism from the public debate might have its roots in the elimination of the solidarity-based discourses, discourses that have been shaping feminist identity during the previous, so to say, “pre-transformation” phase. Abortion debate revealed that the specific Polish context, from which liberal traditions are similarly absent, situates the feminist identity in between legacies of the previous system on the one hand, and appropriation of solidarity on the other. Failure of the abortion battle became not only a “wake up call” for the feminist mobilization in Poland, but it also had theoretical implications as it provided an impulse to reflect on the appropriation of the liberal, individualistic discourses into the debate on women and pointed to the fact that intellectual horizons of Polish feminism must to reach outside and beyond liberal and Marxist discourses.

Was Communism bad for Women?

A certain inconsistency between the evaluation of undeniable achievements of the socialist state, its ideology and origins is characteristic to current feminist thought in Poland. Polish feminists have no doubt that the Communist regime provided women with certain social security services, such as free day care, maternity leave and possibilities of full and part time employment (Titkow 1999, Fuszara 2001). Throughout the post-war period in all Central and Eastern European countries, the participation of women in the labor markets increased and outnumbered by far their Western European counterparts. In the eyes of feminists, however, the Communist regime’s commitment to gender equality was highly limited and often times reduced to empty slogans represented by the image of

“women on the tractors” (Fuszara 2003). Solutions provided by the communist ideology did not go any deeper below the surface; traditional women’s roles as mothers (most powerfully embodied in the image of Mother Pole) and wives were never challenged (Brach Czaina 1998, Walczewska 1996). The damage that Communism caused to feminism has been far bigger than the advantages it granted.

Joanna Bator certainly captures what many feminists think when she states that we should turn to the analysis of communism to look for the causes of the abortion debate failure in the 1990s. She argues that while making gender difference an ideological tool of the empty propaganda, the communist regime led to both the erosion of the sense of a bond between women as a group and the rise of the Catholic Church as a site of resistance to the communist ideology (Bator 1999). In tune with Bator, Fuszara argues that the façade character of the communist emancipation became evident already in 1989 when, after the first free election, the percentage of women in the Parliament drastically decreased. As the abortion battle bitterly proved, when the Parliament gained real legislative power, men took over and eliminated women (Fuszara 1999).

When scrutinizing why the Polish feminists almost unanimously rejected Communism, one has to keep in mind the “foreign” character of Communism in Poland. As a system imposed onto this country by the Soviet Union, it remained “alien” to most population in Poland for almost 50 years of its lasting. While operating without popular legitimization, Communism attempted to control and restrict individual and collective actions. At the personal level, the lack of control over their own lives shaped feminists’ biographies while intervening with their “personal” experiences such as maternity. Marta, a feminist philosopher reflects on how she turned into feminism as her experience of

becoming a mother during the martial law distanced her from other women and a broader community:

It was during the martial law when, in terms of experimenting I decided to go to the conference on maternity. It was 1984 maybe 1985. I had this experience similar to all my friends that just got their babies, „children of the martial law“; we had nothing to do so everybody got pregnant but we never talked about it. Of course I was going to the meetings at Michnik’s and Kuron’s⁵, and I was part of the Solidarity before 1981. But these two things for me never came together (r9)

In order to prevent women from organizing around the “gender” outside the state control, the Communist regime established and maintained the pseudo-feminist organization of Polish Women’s League (Liga Kobiet Polskich, LKP) with 10 million women’s members “on paper” but no real membership⁶ (Walczevska,1997). Such politics was one of preconditions for women’s hesitation over feminist mobilization in the present. Dozens of years of communism disrupted a “development,” and the “continuity of women’s movement”, and led to the situation when “we have hardly any movement” (r11).

The experience of life under imposed Communism and its artificial commitment to social justice created a peculiar social context, in which the word “Marxism” did no longer stand for Marx’s theory or even any particular ideology but represented an undesirable political situation. In the later years, these two aspects of Marxism--as ideology and experience--blended into the rejection of “Marxism” altogether and resulted in an inability to comprehend its significance for feminist experience in other geographical locations (Walczevska 1996, Limanowska 1997). Till this day, Marxism

⁵ Adam Michnik and Jacek Kuron were two prominent Solidarity activists

⁶ Walczevska argues that, like in case of Polish Communist party, the statistics of the membership LKP were forged.

remains on the margins of the genealogy of Polish feminists, many of whom still position it as contradictory to the idea of the social movement itself:

I was always astonished and disgusted by conversations with women who placed their hope in the post-communist left. It was beyond my mind, feminism to me made sense only as a continuation of the „democratic opposition“. Feminism coupled with communism I’ve been perceiving as an aberration“ (r13)

This rejection of Marxism as a general concept or theoretical, intellectual possibility is, I believe, solely responsible for the major difficulties that Polish and other feminisms from Central and Eastern Europe experience while entering transnational feminist debates. The disparity between the postcommunist context and the transnational feminist discourses that are often times based on Marxist critique makes the Central and Eastern European feminist narratives incompatible with the narratives from other geographical locations.

Connection and “Solidarity”

“Solidarity” movement that, throughout the 1980s, represented values of freedom, equality and social justice, seemed like a decent alternative to the politically corrupted and imperially dependent Communist state and constituted an important lineage of feminist genealogy. In 1990s, however, “solidarity” attained a bitter taste of betrayal; as union leaders celebrated their political victory, women experienced the opposite: a radical turn right in the area of women’s issues. After the defeat of Communism, “Solidarity” “took care” of women with the clear agenda that “in free Poland woman is not a free individual, but a *family being*, who instead of politics should take care of the home“ (Janion, 1999, p.25). Such agenda was clearly embodied in the way “Solidarity” handled the “abortion issue”. When in 1989 leaders of Solidarity asked Malgorzata

Tarasiewicz to establish the “women’s section” of the movement, she found herself in the middle of the abortion struggle within “Solidarity.” Tarasiewicz describes their motives in the interview with Sławka Walczewska:

Trade union’s internationals began to pressure „Solidarity“ to do something for women, and because the donations from „western“ organization were to come, they decided to *do something*“ (Walczewska 2005, 28)

“Solidarity’s” leaders wanted “Western” money; they did not, however, expect that women’s section would in fact become an active unit. Under Tarasiewicz’s lead, the section generated two demands: the right to legal abortion and quotas for women in the union leadership positions. The first claim was in a direct opposition to the position on abortion by the Catholic Church, a major Solidarity’s ally. After the women’s section supported the liberal abortion law in the Parliament against the official position of the union, Tarasiewicz was forced to quit. Shortly after that, the members of the women’s section were denied access to the office and telecommunication and were refused the union’s approval to travel abroad. After a period of the struggle for survival, devoid of a leader, the section dispersed (Walczewska 2005, 30). Tarasiewicz, however, decided to give testimony to what happened in “Solidarity” as she perceived the actions of the “Solidarity” leaders as a violation of women’s rights. She disclosed her story to the Human Rights Watch. Soon after that she became the director of Amnesty International Poland, and later the director of the Network of East-West Women.

Certainly, Tarasiewicz’s involvement in the “Solidarity” was not an accident. She was one of the five million women who constituted half of the membership of the union

throughout the eighties⁷. She was involved in the work of the youth organization “Peace and Freedom” that closely cooperated with Solidarity and was one of a number of Para-“Solidarity” incubators of the feminist identity.

“At first we just sat and talk”

For Hania the mid 80s “Solidarity” is a template of the social movement itself:

I realized that my experience of the mass movement concentrates around the national, patriotic and independent state narrative. I remember from mid 80 Solidarity demonstrations, which were often initiated by people coming back from the Sunday mass (...) I think that Solidarity had a major impact on perception of the Polish feminism in the beginning (r13).

Aneta too very strongly connects feminism to the “Solidarity’s” ideals. Remaining at the outskirts of the mainstream movement, Aneta argues that she purposely chooses not to become a “professional feminist” as for her, women’s activism is more about civil engagement and activism in that elusive public sphere that brings social capital to one’s private, political and professional life. In the 1985, Aneta worked as a graphic designer for one of the underground periodicals. This period, in Polish historiography known as “Second Solidarity”, might as well be seen as a beginning of an end of Communism. While the communist state was still in the picture, it started to fall apart “from within”; the society already knew that the end of Communism is approaching. “Of course there had been no feminist organizations yet”, Aneta argues. Feminism, however, as a part of the “civil society” was emerging quite fiercely. At this point, the status of feminism among other segments of civil society was also very different from how it came to be

⁷ Only two of them, Zofia Kuratowska, and Krystyna Starczewska, were invited to “round table” negotiations that peacefully dismantled the communist regime in 1989.

represented during the abortion debate:

(Middle 80s) was a time when everybody was doing something, starting something; every decent person had a life beyond the dying and demolished socialist state. It was really nice to have „that something” with other women (...) Feminism wasn't terrifying to people, like it started to be later in 1990s. It had no connotations, good or bad. It wasn't ridiculed. We were treated very differently then we are now. Back then feminism was a part of emerging civil society, whose units didn't judge each other (r12).

Drawing on previously established connections and mobilizing resources located in the Western Europe, feminist movement “began”. Slawka remembers exactly when feminism started for her:

Feminist movement began in the middle of 1980s. It started after the Warsaw Film Festival “Kino Kobiet” in 1986. We talked a lot then; we had few very crucial meetings. Even though there were only few of us, when one of our friends was coming back from Amsterdam and Berlin, we all got together (r16).

As there were no possibilities of expanding institutionally - any free association independent from the Communist party were still illegal - reciprocity and connection became central to the aim to re-constructing the experience of “gender:”

What was very important was mutual attraction; we liked meeting, talking to each other. These meetings had order though; they had an aim to talk about us. The language we had at that time was very poor, it lacked conceptualization of how day-to-day experience relates to gender, how we are “in” gender internally (...) These meetings for a long time took place in the private apartments, in the kitchens. They were by all means support

groups. It was so beautiful, and this is how we thought about it, that these are groups to support women, in the new less recognized and newly defined femininity (...) (r12)

The need to recognize women's own experience came first; the actual interpretation of the experience and the link between experience and feminist theory was yet to be formed.

The language of Polish feminism was rooted solely in the experience of particular locations, as the Iron Curtain, still in place, made impossible any initiation of a transnational dialogue:

What was the most important for us at that time was to recognize our experience within our misogynic culture. We were trying the possibility of looking at our own and women's lives through the feminist lenses. And in the group it was easier to be done. It was really some kind of the consciousness raising (...) the texts came much later (...) At first we just sat and talked (r16)

This newly recognized solidarity between women and the recognition of the common experience, led Aneta to believe that it is necessary to create a separate space where women could "abstract" their experience from the anticommunist struggle:

For us feminism at that time simply meant that woman should have the same rights, that she is not treated equally. And there is less space for her. Some fundamentals: that we are full citizens, that we are underappreciated, that the feminist culture is really interesting. But most of all we were discovering ourselves as women. Not as a human beings, the democratic opposition activists, but as a persons with full appreciation of our own gender. This, I think was our main strength (r12)

Although the feminists aimed at the separation of women's experience from the anticommunist struggle, they by no means rejected it; it remained central to their genealogy:

Our resource was this „can of worms“ that got opened in 1980-1981, when the society got „de-frosted“. Before then if you wanted to do something, just talk only, you had to get the permission of the institution, school, university and so on. If they gave you permission, they usually required modification of your topic so it fits into the official propaganda. It was thanks to Solidarity that the space got opened (...) We first tried out the free space, and then some of us decided to become feminists. It was only thanks to the Solidarity that we could organize open meeting for people from outside our own group (...) Solidarity gave us a framework in which we could do something beyond the strict control of the (communist) party's state. Solidarity opened the space and that space we could enter with our feminism (r16)

“Since I remember there were no men...” Gender, solidarity and the national struggle

Even though Malgosia, Aneta and Slawka actively participated in rebuilding or defrosting social connections damaged by Communist regime, the narratives of “Solidarity” and feminism dispersed after 1989. Graff was right in her observation that in order for men to regain the authority and position of symbolic power and control, women's input into “Solidarity” had to be erased. At the figurative level, union leaders and historians made sure that women's presence did not interrupt the proper national narrative⁸. The “Solidarity myth” represents women either as anonymous wives or the

⁸ Deprived of women the myth of “Solidarity” goes as follows: on August 14th, 1980 Lech Walesa jumps through the fence of the Gdansk Shipyard to join his fellow workers on strike; the strike that he himself is an immediate cause (workers were protesting his dismissal). Later on that day five intellectuals, all men

hostesses (and often lovers) of the hiding “Solidarity” leaders during the martial law. One of the most powerful of all is the image of women awaiting their husbands in front of the Shipyard gate in the summer of 1980. While women are situated outside the strike, the banner hang on the Shipyard gate depicted an image of Virgin Mary and the slogan “Women Go Home! We Are Fighting for Poland!”

To re-write the history of “Solidarity” became one of the major concerns of Polish feminists. For once “Solidarity” was, after all part of some feminists’ trajectories. Particularly before 1990, they felt as a part of the broader emancipation movement, from which, they believed, women would benefit as much as men. On the other hand women’s (and feminists’) presence in the “Solidarity” narrative was a matter of legitimization of feminism or its accountability within the national myth if you will. To become a part of the feminist genealogy, the Solidarity narrative needed to be regrouped and women had to be put back in, behind “the gate”⁹.

The period of martial law, when women such as Barbara Labuda (in Wroclaw) and

except for one woman, come from Warsaw to support workers on strike in their negotiations with the government. They are representatives of the KOR (Workers Defense Committee). Their presence in the shipyard symbolizes the unprecedented in the history alliance between intellectuals and proletariat: one that in a straight line leads to the defeat of communism in Central Eastern Europe. Negotiations with government end with the legalization of an independent labor union, the first in postwar Poland and in the whole region . About 10 million people become members of “Solidarity” (out of 40 millions of Poland’s population). One and a half year festival of freedom ends suddenly on a cold winter night in the middle of December 1981, when general Wojciech Jaruzelski announces martial law, under which “all kind of gatherings, agreements, and collective meetings are abolished”. Most of the “Solidarity” leaders get arrested and stay in a prison till the end of 1982; some of them remain in hiding, from where they continue their struggle against communism.

⁹ In the feminist re-interpretation of “Solidarity”, at least four women played a crucial role in the initiation of the August 1980 Shipyard. Anna, Walentynowicz, a crane operator, was a grassroots workers organizer since late 1970s. She eventually got fired with Walesa and along with him became the immediate cause of the workers’ protest. Alina Pienkowska worked in a shipyard as a nurse. It was she who on August 14th called Jacek Kuron’s Warsaw apartment to publicize the strike and ask for support. At that point, a delegation of workers on strike in the city approached Walesa, who was eager to compromise with the government, and accused him of selling out the strike: “If you abandon us, we’ll be lost. Buses can’t face tanks!” shouted their spokesperson a tram driver Henryka Krzywonos. Pienkowska, Walentynowicz and Ewa Ossowska, who was a leader of Young Poland; aware of what might come next, she forbid the demobilized workers to leave the shipyard by keeping the gate closed.

Ewa Kulik (in Warsaw) took over leadership positions in several critical segments of the underground, is crucial to this project. During that period women also lead most of the underground press. Exclusively women did the biggest weekly “Tygodnik Solidarnosc”; for almost three years, no single man was a member of the editorial board. Recognized as passive Mother Poles by the police, women used gender stereotypes to their advantage in conspiring against the communist regime (Kondratowicz, 2000, Penn 1996, Penn 2003, Penn 2006). For example, they brought into play fake pregnancies to cover illegal publications, or shopping bags to carry leaflets. Or, they engaged older women, who enjoy most respect and generate least distrust, to carry significant information and keep in touch with male leaders in hiding. For the sake of efficiency, women sometimes maintained the illusion of male leadership. Danuta Winiarska, for instance, created a fictional male character to be a leader of “Solidarity” in Lublin. Passing under the male name of “Abramczyk”, she made decisions, signed documents and wrote appeals. There is no doubt that there were women who “defeated communism” as women, for many of them “gendered” experience of being a woman was a source of strategies, ideas and as well political choices was the (Penn 2005).

Early attempts to inscribe the Solidarity women’s experience into the feminist genealogy, however, failed miserably. For a number of years, the bitter argument between proponents of the “feminist” interpretation of “Solidarity” and “Solidarity” women went on and feminist and Solidarity genealogies remained separated. From their side, “Women of Solidarity” rejected feminist’s interpretation as trivial. They thought the understanding of “leadership” and “femininity” proposed by feminists is limiting and superficial as it focused on gender and omitted the broader national aspect of their

struggle.

Much later “Solidarity Women” and feminists reconciled over a discovery of yet another lineage of their common genealogy. In 2001, as a follow-up of Penn’s work, Ewa Kondratowicz decided to revisit 20 women activists with the question of feminism. For Kondratowicz, like for Marta and Ewa, the period of communism was mainly a time of motherhood, and thus she decided to utilize this experience and reach out to “Solidarity Women” from the positionality of “Mother Pole”. This tactic enabled her to establish quite a different relation with them and unravel a more complex picture of “gender” mediated through nationalism. Although women who she spoke to were fully aware of the “gender” character of their activism, they interpreted it in terms of the continuous women’s involvement of various forms of national struggle. They tied the anti-communism activism with the struggle of their mothers and grandmothers who fought the Russian Empire during the 19th Century and the Nazi occupation during the Second World War (Luczywo, Romaszewska, Bugno Zalewska, in Kondratowicz 2001). They traced their activism experience back to the past women’s involvement, much like some of the feminists. Malgorzata Tarasiewicz in the her interview with Sławomira Walczewska recalls:

I was always fascinated with my family roots, the family from Warsaw and Vilnius. (...) There were two women there, one was active in anti-German opposition; she died tortured in Pawiak. The other one was pregnant and she was shot on the streets of Warsaw. It is horrible what happened to them, but the knowledge about their bravery, and the fact that they were from my family, and the awareness that I can rely on these women, gives me strength (Walczewska, p.25)

The Second World War and post-War period has been marked by displacement and disempowerment in all of Central and Eastern Europe. For these process also marked the paradoxical empowerment, as in the situation of lack of men they had to manage their own fate Malgorzata Tarasiewicz describes the role that war played in her life as follows: I was born long after the war but still it effected me very vividly. In my family only women survived the war; all the men were killed. Since I remember there were no men in the life of my great-grand mother or my grandmother... My great-grand mother, grandmother and mother came to Sopot to the so called “regained soils” (land taken away from Germany after the World War II) from Warsa). People who got expelled from the East (West Ukraine and Lithuania that were part of Poland before the War) and those who no longer wanted to live where they experienced the war had been settling here (...) (Tarasiewicz in Walczewska 2005, 23)

“I dream Polish feminism will be *plain* one day...”

The experience of post-war, communist Poland, nationalism and Catholicism comes together in yet another lineage of feminist genealogy, one within which “everything comes down to the history of Jews in Poland”. As a daughter of philosophers, Hania was born into Polish intelligentsia, the class that claims to have a long and distinguished patriotic tradition. She was brought up Catholic and as most of the Warsaw’s intelligentsia’s children became part of the Catholic scouting (The Club of Catholic Intelligentsia). For a long time Hania was a devoted Catholic; she recalls having “visions and even talking to Virgin Mary in the forest”. Later on in her life, Hania discovered her Jewish origins, the “inherited trauma” that was the experience of many Jews who decided to stay in Poland after the Holocaust. As a teenager she moved overseas and became acquainted with the feminism in the USA US. She came back to Poland, and as a “liberal” feminist started to be active in academia and work with

informal feminist groups. Hania speculates that “it is not an accident that me and couple of my friends became feminists. It is significant in our biographies”. But she also confesses that “for a long time I couldn’t work it out, my Jewish identity”, come into terms with the fact that she is not “blond haired, *plain*, Slavic country girl type” and that many of her feminist friends aren’t either. The experience of not belonging to the “race” of Polish “blond women”, Hania translates into the experience of feminism being foreign to Polish women, as she argues that Polish feminism is not *plain* as well. She sees herself and feminism as outsiders of the mainstream Polish political culture as she states that her real point of reference is “the Jewish leftist tradition in Poland, and US”. As a Jewish woman living in Poland, Hania describes the spectrum of her political and life choices as follows:

There are two strategies of Polish Jewish women with intelligentsia roots. One is to become part of the crowd, the other to become a feminist (...).The generation of 68 is not part of Polish patriotic mainstream, these people never felt comfortable in it. This is the internal split (r13)

The generation of 68, which she refers to brings us to another women’s story. Born in 1950, Bozena is a generation older than Hania. As a daughter of “somehow privileged” Jewish-communist family, Bozena grew up “unaware and disconnected from patriarchal and anti-Semitic Polish society”. Her story begins in March 1968, during the students’ riots at Warsaw University¹⁰. Bozena Umińska in her interview with Walczewska recalls that:

¹⁰ In March 1968 Warsaw University students were protesting the relegation of two young communists, Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski. As the student riots went “out of control”, Modzelewski, Kuroń and others were suddenly accused of representing demands and interests inspired by “foreign, imperialistic forces”. Shortly after, their Jewish origins had been claimed and became the subject of a fierce party’s persecution. The party employed anti-Semitism rhetoric; it sought to pull out the public attention from

(...) in 1968 I found myself studying psychology at Warsaw University. By complete accident, uninformed about what is going on, I found myself at the students' demonstration, which ended up with police beating us up (...). I remember I saw so-called workers "aktyw" (activists), which most probably were just police dressed up in grey raincoats. I ran away into the "Psychology" building. (...) When "aktyw" showed up at the door, I, roaring as animal, threw a chair at them. And that was a first moment of sobering up. (...) I was scared to death so I ran and hid in the women's bathroom (...). It had a backyard window. I remember it was March 8, Women's Day, and there was snow in the backyard. I remember I had that feeling that I'm at the window, watching a movie or something. In the movie two duds in grey coats are beating up a girl that is lying in the snow. This was the scene that was beyond my eyes, beyond my emotional capacity (Walczevska, 128-129)

What Hania seems to entail is that for Bożena's Umińska's generation the experience of exclusion based upon sex/gender goes hand in hand with the experience of anti-Semitism. But it is not simply the experience of "gender" and "ethnicity" that intersected in Umińska's story. Her narrative, as it touches upon Polish nationalism, Catholicism, anti-Semitism and sexism, tells the story of many more layers of social exclusion, rooted much deeper in the history of Polish-Jewish relations.

In his book "Fear", Jan Gross vividly examines how a lot of postwar history of Jews in Poland and Polish postwar anti-Semitism circulate around the workings of the stereotype of the "Judo-Communism" (Żydo-Komuna), the slur that very powerfully describes the way Jews were positioned in the national, anticommunist discourse (Gross

students' claims and "clean" the party from "unwanted elements" (niepożądanych elementów). Representatives of the „real Polish working class“ were driven to Warsaw to defeat the student riots. Eventually, the "March events" lead to the biggest after 1945 anti-Semitic campaign, the relegation of the Jewish students and faculty from higher education institutions around Poland and emigration of some 13000 Jews from the country.

2006)¹¹. After the War, Gross argues Jews had two choices; they could either leave (and many did) the country or make a choice within the spectrum of the postwar Polish political scene-- to become outsiders or part of the Communist regime. “Hiding” or becoming invisible by for instance changing the name as Bożena’s parents did was one of the strategies to erase the difference, to become un-Jewish. That same strategy of “becoming a crowd” that Hania recalls in reference to Polish Jewish women in post 1968 Poland also meant turning to be a part of the opposition movement. Becoming a part of the Polish opposition movement, to which Catholicism was central, meant to erase the “difference”, to become un-Jewish. Similarly to become part of the Polish opposition movement, to which narrative Church and patriarchal family had been fundamental, must meant to disregard or repress one’s “gender”, to become, so to say, an “un-woman”.

The lines of connection between feminism and mainstream women’s activism have to be partial and fragmented as the “difference” represented by feminists cannot be erased or submerged to the national agenda that had been organized around the Catholic

¹¹Gross argues that, given they were loyal citizens of the pre-war Poland, many Jews were skeptical of and critical toward the postwar regime. Yet, as much as they would be eager to express their refutation of the regime by joining the opposition movement, church-sustained Catholics who opposed the regime, mass organizations and illegal organizations wanted to have nothing to do with the Jews. On the other hand, what appeared to be the greatest attractions of Communism for Polish Jews who managed to survive World War II was the promise of abandonment of racial and ethnic discourses in the name of universal equality. Polish Jews also remember that it was the Red Army, after all, that saved them from the death camps in 1945. Polish Jews’ trouble with the Communism, however, lied in the disparity between the regime’s “ideology” and practice. While in the “ideal” communist society all the ethnic discourses would be erased, the communist regime in post-war Poland had to remain pragmatic in order to sustain itself. Given the fact that it was generally undesirable, in order for it to survive the regime, it had to utilize some of the popular sentiments and stereotypes. As Polish society came with the strong xenophobic and Anti-Semitic attitude, as well as strong attachment to Catholic religion and family values, Communists were aiming at working the legitimacy of the regime around these sentiments. First there was a denial of the unique character of Holocaust for Jews, then reclaiming a strong position of the Catholic Church in Poland. Poland was the only country in the region in which the Church was not de-legalized. Moreover, in order to neutralize the influence of the Catholic Church, the regime allowed the presence of the pseudo-Catholic organization (PAX) in the Parliament. Even more hypocritically, the regime, Gross argues, utilized pre-war national socialist activists with the clear Anti-Semitic stands to run this organization (Gross, 225) This “carefully orchestrated fusion between Communist and fascists” was created to acquire legitimacy in a very unreceptive social environment. The same tactic was used in 1968.

religion. For Hania, alienation from the society, as a Jew and as a woman, becomes a metaphorical tool that she uses to comprehend the identity of the feminism in Poland. The exclusion that feminist experience, with a slight difference that the feminist difference is impossible to erase, because anti-Catholicism, Hania argues, is its core:

We cannot connect to Polish tradition of Catholicism. We are not part of it, we are outside this tradition. Polish feminists are very differently positioned in their own culture than feminist from say Trinidad. My friend, a feminist activist, before she became one, was an antiracists movement's activist. She was part of the creation of the Trinidad sovereign state; she was part of the mainstream. (r13)

It is certainly not to say that all feminists are Jewish or non-Catholic. The way Hania represents feminism, however, depicts the feminists' ambiguous positionality and double alienation as a Jew and a woman, the experience of double marginalization. Although they are with other women in the anti-Communist struggle, in the national discourse as being anti-Church, they are automatically relegated into the margins of the mainstream political discourse. On the other hand, however, this dynamic shows how much Polish feminism is in fact embedded in the Polish national context, through self-reflective and constant struggle to position feminist identity within, even if on the outskirts of the national discourse. Hania is aware that the exclusion she experiences has its genealogy within that context, which at the same time is the context of exclusion and resistance. As the mainstream national struggle is continually tied to Catholicism, Hania's feminist struggle is continually tied to the tradition of fighting religious fundamentalism. The tradition to which she subscribes is very "foreign", and yet very derivative of the Polish political scene:

I think for us the tradition that we build on is the tradition of fighting Anti-Semitism during the pre-war period. We fight Polish ultra-Catholicism, as they fought National Socialists. This is the return of the pre-war history to which the key is anti-Semitism. And the Jewish reformist movement that I feel I'm an heiress, is by all means atheist (r13).

Jewish feminist identity is only one instance of the feminist identity constructed through the contextualized experience of gender, one that simultaneously has its origins in the particular geographical social location and is very foreign to this very location. Hania's narrative illustrates beautifully how the layers of belonging and exclusion built on one another within one individual experience of class, ethnicity and religion, and how they come into being in the society that refuses difference and strives to erase it.

This rejection of difference, I believe, has to be conceptualized in relation to the experience of displacement and disempowerment that has shaped biographies of many Poles in the aftermath of the Second World War and the major re-bordering of Europe¹². While Poles felt alienated from the new, postwar social and geographic order, the fact that it was not the Soviet Union solely, but also its US and Western European allies who decided that Poland along with other eastern European countries became satellites of the Soviet empire, caused a great deal of disappointment. The feelings of distress, disempowerment and abandonment, immanent to the Polish postwar society, are not, however, peculiar to the postwar period. I believe these feelings represent the workings of the postcolonial legacies of Europe in the Polish national identity.

Disregarded "Second World"- Postcolonial dynamics of Poland

¹² In Poland's case, while some of its East soils became parts of the Soviet Union (mainly Western Ukraine and Lithuania), Poland was granted so-called "regain lands" in the West of Oder Western soils that previously belonged to Germany.

Part of the explanation of why the Second World does not fit into the existing postcolonial framework lies in the fact that the assessments of the Western or European imperialism focus exclusively on the appraisal of capitalism and draw from the Marxist critique of capitalistic societies. The major narratives of European imperialism trace the rise of the capitalistic empires of the 19th Century Europe, mostly Great Britain and France, and follow their destinies embodied in their 20th century heir, the United States. For a vast majority of the mainstream as well as feminist postcolonial theories, the relationship between the First and Third worlds remains a central point of inquiry (Said 1979, Spivak 1989, Mohanty 2001, Eisentein 2006). The so-called Second World is significantly absent from this scholarship as relations within Europe remain at the periphery of postcolonial theorizing. The ambiguous positionality of the Second World seems to be inconspicuous, self-evident and further substantiated by the fact that this region, located in the “heart of Europe,” is also hardly considered part of the European continent’s historical narratives. Historians in Germany and some intellectuals in Poland are currently challenging the mysterious silence around “colonial legacies” of the Second World and argue that over the centuries Poland, along with the most of the countries in Central Eastern Europe, constitute particular instances of colonialism *in* Europe (Jedlicki, 1999, Janion 2003, Cavanagh 2005, Kapuscinski 2005).

The Russian empire and its descendant, Soviet Union, can surely be considered an example of the appraisal of internal European imperialism and its cultural consequences in the eastern parts of Europe. It is perhaps needless to say that the experience of war and postwar geopolitical order is in itself the experience of “colonization,” as Poles watched their country divided between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in

September 1939 and incorporated into the Soviet empire's sphere of influence after the "Yalta" conference in 1945. Because the Soviet Union did not dismantle until just more than a decade ago, Cavanagh points out that that might mean that some European "colonies" did not achieve their independence until 1989, forty years after India, and twenty-seven years after Algeria (Cavanagh 2005).

But such claims have to face challenges that come with current formulations of the postcolonial theory. Since Marxism in Poland has always been associated with the Soviet Empire, which was at the same time a major colonizing force in the region, Polish condemnation of imperialist practices will find no place in the mainstream postcolonial narratives. If Russia and its descendant Soviet Union are to be considered an instance of imperialism, not only the "direction" of colonization will have to be re-defined but also the perception of the "ideology" that stands behind the colonial practices of the Empire.

On the other hand, the status of Central Eastern Europe within East-West, South-North dynamics is hard to capture because in this region colonization processes had never been performed as one-way dynamics. Indeed, the postcolonial anxieties in Poland are mostly directed toward Russia, and its heir, the Soviet Union. In one of a very few accounts on colonization, Maria Janion gives us a hint of the Polish relation to this empire neighbor and how it positions Polish identity within Europe:

We are the postcolonial country that at the same time – which happens often- feels superiority over its colonizer- Russia. In this we have been identifying ourselves as Europe, struggling with the Asian barbarism. As true Latin Catholics and Mediterranean

Europeans we are not able to identify with Slavs, because this would make us closer to the “inferiority” of Russia. (Janion 2004, 34)

But Polish experience of colonization in Europe, as with many other countries in the region, is far more complicated and irreducible to the Russian “westward” expansion. It is also much “older” than the Second World War. The region has been the subject of interests of both Eastern and Western imperial powers. Indeed one of the most prominent features of the political geography and the history of the region is its traveling status – between East and West, North and South of Europe. As Eastern colonization goes as far as the Ottoman Empire in the 16th and 17th Centuries, over the 18th and 19th Centuries, a majority of the central eastern European nations have been also “colonized” by the Western empires—Prussia, Austria (and then Austro-Hungarian). Poland between 1772 and 1793, for instance, was partitioned three times; it had disappeared from the map of Europe for almost 200 years and existed merely in the realm of narrative, fantasy, or to borrow Said’s term, “imaginative geography.” The only other region that has a similar experience of the early and late colonialism in Europe is Ireland.

Further complication of Polish colonial status comes with the realization that throughout centuries, this country attempted to take possession of the nations east of it:

(A)s a postcolonial country we are not real Europeans, since as Slavs, we are inferior, we are stigmatized by the Russian- Slavic “bad blood”. We have been at the same time the colonized and the colonizer for the Slavic Brother-land. Till today we feel superior toward it, but at the same time experience some kind of relation to its “inferiority.” Some of these features characterize also the relations between Poles and Jews (Janion 2004, 32)

Because over the years Poland has a number of times colonized various parts of its eastern neighbors, such as Lithuania and Ukraine, it holds a double positionality as the “colonized” and “colonizer” of Europe.

Finally, as much as the discussion of the workings of the European empires will benefit from an analysis of the experience of the Second World countries, it will also introduce a major challenge to its categories. The inclusion of the Second World in the postcolonial theory will have to address a broader question of how far a certain theoretical framework can be stretched. Can we really claim that throughout European history there have been instances of European empires with European colonies? For a start the overseas aspect crucial for colonial dynamics is missing here. The lands taken away from the countries within the European continent actually have never been called “colonies,” the term being reserved for the overseas protectorates. While the Western European empires used to represent parts of the partitioned Poland as “properties,” “provinces,” “eastern borderlands” or “eastern frontiers”, in Russian terminology the name the Kingdom of Poland prevailed over the idea of the “Polish protectorate”.

Moreover, although both Western and Eastern empires employed various practices of “racialization” of “colonized” European provinces, the question of the significance of “race” in relations between empire and its borderlands is yet to be explored. In her work Lenny A. Urena explores “colonial turn” in German historiography and connects it to the racial construction of border subjects located at the eastern Prussian frontiers since 19th century to Nazi Germany¹³ (Urena 2003). Nineteenth century relations between the

¹³ “Colonial turn” has not only represented a major methodological shift in the way recent literature reevaluates the Imperial Germany, but also brought back important debates about continuities/ruptures between this period and the Nazi Germany. This new analyses tend to locate the origins of the Final

German empire and its overseas colonies, Urena argues, had its impact on relations “at home,” that is, the relations between the metropolis and its European properties. The postcolonial framework may help us put into perspective the social conflicts experienced by minority groups in the European realm of the empire and gives us the tools to understand the ideology and images that people used in order to describe cultural tensions. Early 19th century German health discourses represented Slavs as members of a “weaker race;” eastern borderlands are portrayed as a primitive, chaotic, wild space. The urge to introduce *rassen-hygiene* as a response to uncontrolled reproduction of the weaker race and the threat of “polonization” is mediated through the racialized representation of gender and sexuality. On one hand uninhibited reproduction of the Slavs is juxtaposed by reproductive laziness of German women; on the other, *rassen-hygiene* is a response to the uncontrolled blending of the “Polish blood” into “German culture”, which is a result of mixed marriages. A marriage to a Polish woman represents a threat against German cultural values. German men are portrayed as victims of the Polish national cause that uses Polish women to seduce and emasculate German men. While Germans men colonize with guns, Polish women conquer with an even stronger weapon: love (Urena 2003).

In the German colonial discourses, Polish women mostly appear as seducers, and their subjectivity is substantiated by their sexuality and “race”. Russian colonial represents women as the most decadent, inflated features of Polish nation. In 1886 Alexander Koszelow, who was sent by Alexander II to Polish Kingdom to assess the prospects of defeating the Polish national identity, reported the Poles as a carefree,

Solution in the scientific ideas about social engineering and population policies that were advanced during the imperial era.

phony, false, reliant and malicious nation: “In Polish women these faults are even more developed than in men. It is easy thus to explain why women in Poland dominated the men,” he stated (Janion 2001, 5). According to Koszellow, “femininity” is what describes Polish identity the best and at the same time explains why Poles were unable to maintain their independent nation state. In both accounts “Polishness” was thus identified as femininity through its representations, ethnicity (Polish blood), sexuality and national faults. Poland, in other words, is a woman.

Are we there yet? Polish feminism and the “West”

In Polish feminist narratives the colonial legacies of Europe translate into the perception of the center –periphery dynamics, regional differences and finally representation of the West as a desirable model of feminist trajectory. Hania, who lives in Warsaw, a part of the former Russian empire argues:

We are in the sphere of Russia’s influence. I think that if feminism in Russia was developed and if we would had an inferiority complex toward it, if Russia was any kind of intellectual center, as America is, this dialogue would have had its place. And maybe it will take place some day. But now we think of Russians as savages and Russians think we are arrogant (...) (r13)

But Ania, who is from Krakow, the city that used to belong to the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, recognizes her point of reference quite differently:

(...) Maybe for Warsaw feminists Moscow is a center. (...)Vienna or Berlin, this is closer to me, it’s my reality, here in this part of Poland (r27).

Past imperial belongings intersect with the economic differences and development of the particular regions while the long lasting cultural divide between “westernized”

(civilized) Prussian and Austrian provinces and the “backward” Russian protectorate is still in place. The former Russian Empire is without question the one that is most often recognized as a draining colonizer, the force that attempts to destroy and exploit Poland. Its western counterparts, particularly the Austro-Hungarian empires are on the other hand often evaluated as having “positive” effects on the economic development of its eastern provinces.

Such perception represents the long lasting belief of Polish intellectual elites and upper classes that Western Europe and later the US is the desired model of civilization to follow. Already in 1760, just before the first partition, Polish advocates of the Enlightenment argued that the “West” is the model to be followed by the “backward” and declining Polish republic ¹⁴. In the 1916 “Note on the Polish Problem” Joseph Conrad presents Poland as a thorn between barbarous, alien “Russian Slovonism” of the imperial east and empires of the rational civilized “West”(Cavanagh, 2005, 86). He argues that Poles “are west, with an absolute comprehension of all Western modes of thought” (Cavanagh, 86). Poland should therefore regain her independence with the help “of her Western friends” (Cavanagh, 86). She should be “adopted” by the “West.”

Yet, due to its complex position between the eastern and western sphere of influences Poland’s developmental choice was, as other nations’ in the region, not a choice between the freedom and foreign dependence, but the choice between “lesser

¹⁴ The “West” was not, however, perceived as homogenous. For obvious reasons Prussia and Austria as partitioning powers had a distinguished status in the Polish conceptualization of the “West”. England, Holland and Switzerland represented the most desirable models of development. After the first partition in 1772, and the success of the French Revolution, the pro-French orientation became stronger and particular hopes Poles tied to Napoleon’s victories.

evils”¹⁵. Anti-Occidental stands were most loudly expressed by Polish intellectuals who have been “on emigration” after the defeat of the 1830 and 1863 national uprisings. The 19th century Polish emancipation discourse as a mainstream national emancipation narrative, tied the need to follow Western Europe and then US has been represented as a civilization with the claim of national independence. Suffragists’ demands for education and enlightenment of women were tapped into national discourses, and thus the resurrection of the nation-state remained central to the feminist discourses under partition. The early formation of the women’s rights movement, the raise of the emancipation discourse within the struggle for restoration of the nation state, created the situation with no precedence in Europe, in which women became recognized as citizens within a country that had not yet even been recognized as a country on the map of Europe (Walczevska 1996, Boratyńska 2000).

More currently the feminist movement widely supported Polish accession to the European Union that has been considered a symbolic victory of the rational tradition of the European Enlightenment. For Poland, as well as for many other countries in Central Eastern Europe, the process of transformation from the belonging to the Soviet Bloc was tied to the desire to meet the “standards” of the Western European liberal democracy and

¹⁵ As for the Polish intellectual elites, the Western European tradition of Enlightenment has always been a main system of reference for the majority of the Polish society. Romanticism as opposed to Enlightenment, and while tying the “Polishness” and Catholicism, remained the main point of reference in constructing the Polish national identity. In Poland, as in Germany and England, Romanticism was one of the intellectual movements that represented a dislike of the cosmopolitan legacy of the Enlightenment for the claims of rationalism and empiricism. The nineteenth century Polish Romanticism became anti-Occidentalism only inasmuch as its representatives believed that in that society utilitarianism and commercial ethic were gaining the upper hand over sacrifice and freedom. The Europe of Enlightenment has been seen, by some of the critics of the West, as a form of negation of human nature, a rotten civilization. Falsehood, hypocrisy, selfishness, vanity, depravation and force were some of its characteristics. In the profit oriented Western industrial civilization, economic rivalry destroys the links between human beings that utterly leads to the destruction of social ties. Only resistance of the combined socialism and capitalism could save Poland and indeed the entire Slav world. Bourgeoisie societies, which had lost moral bonds of Christianity, would prove helpless in the face of the coming revolution.

capitalism (Walczevska 1996). While at the symbolic level the accession to the European Union is often interpreted as a “return to Europe,” it also indicates the revelation of suppressed regional identities, reconstruction of the cultural ties that bypass national identities and the once again repositioning of the center-periphery dynamics:

Together with the whole European Union, the memories are becoming alive. For example my partner’s father from Sacz (the city at the South West Poland) used to go to Vienna to the opera or even to buy his wine. For him Warsaw was very far away. Vienna was a capitol. And now the Galician thinking is coming back (r27)

As we see, for some feminists the process of European integration is simply the matter of reassuring the previous belonging to wider Western European society. For others, it is rather a symbolic move of confirming cultural ties to the West while distancing themselves from the East. As colonial dynamics are not yet fully gone, and the vivid difference between East and West are still in place, one of the strategies during transformation was to construct the feminist identity according to the “western” trajectory and to inscribe the central eastern European difference in it while using the idea of development. In other words the aim was to present Polish feminism as “western” feminism, only 20 years behind. Needless to say, in such a constructed identity there is no space for a reference to the specificities of central European context. Differences between East and West feminists as well as differences within Polish feminism have to be left behind.

This chapter attempted at problematizing the suitability of linear feminist chronology of the “waves” for the Polish case. A significant part of Polish feminist scholarship throughout the nineties expressed the need to establish a social movement that would meet the standards of the Second Wave Western mass feminism, with its emphasis on

free individual choice and recognition of the shared oppression of women (Rosner, 1997, Dunin, 2002). According to the convergence conception, Poland is “late” comparing to Western Europe and the US, and it needs to “catch up” with them. While it still has some major feminist goals, such as the right to abortion unfulfilled, Polish feminism should focus on establishing the US-like mass feminist movement. Convergence conception of Polish feminism stresses similarities between women from various locations (Szczuka, 2004, Graff, 2004). For instance Kazia Szczuka analyzes the Polish abortion debate as a part of the broader European abortion battle. The nostalgic longing for the mass movement goes along with the romanticized ideal of the US feminist leadership while “still searching for the Polish Betty Friedan...” (Rosner, 1997).

The 1990s approach to the post-Communist location as “lacking” the potentiality of the women’s movement, formulated by western feminists, met and built upon the narrative of the “Western” orientation of Polish intellectual elites where were particularly concerned about the eradication of the contextualized experience of partition, Catholicism, communism and nationalism. The convergence conception of Polish feminism, while prominent during the 1990s, is currently pushed away by the contextualized Polish narratives of the NGO feminism, Generation 2000 feminism, Jewish feminism, Catholic feminism and socialist feminism that are the subject of the subsequent chapters of my analysis. The tension that emerges at the intersection of post-partition, post-communist, solidarity and liberal western feminist theories, however, remains central for the way feminists are represented (and represents themselves) as an “outsider within” both the Polish public debate and the transnational feminist discourse.

This Statement is from the Non-Region represented here at the Fourth World Conference on Women. Our group of countries is a Non-Region because there is no recognizable political or

geographic definition for the region composed of countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. We are bound by the common problems associated with the transition to democracy. In this difficult and uneven transition, the most serious problem is the consistent and drastic decline in the status of women. The Governments have failed to incorporate the needs and interests of women in their reforms. For example, women face problems with unemployment, trafficking in women and increased violence. Many women have been forced from their home as refugees from war (...). This transition has also created many new opportunities for women. Notably, for the first time in the history of the United Nations, we, as independent NGOs from this region are able to speak for ourselves. I am able to speak to you today because more than 400 women representing more than 80 NGOs from 19 countries came together to articulate the concerns of women of the region. The efforts of our caucus, called East European Caucus, reflect work that began in Bratislava, Vienna, New York and the Beijing Express Train from Warsaw to Beijing (Statement of non-region 1995, Appendix 2 to this dissertation)

Chapter Two: Feminist NGOs- the revival of the “civil society”

Alina, now in her 60s, came back to Poland from Ghana and Turkey at the beginning of the 1990s. In Africa, she was engaged in the work of local women’s groups related to public safety and personal freedom. In Turkey, she became a feminist:

My feminism strengthened when I was in Turkey, where women’s position was very different and it awoke me as a woman. When my nine- year old daughter was going to go to Germany with me, I needed a visa, so I went to the consulate in Istanbul and asked for it. But they told me that my husband needs to come, and of course German consulate concurred. That was one instance of how women were treated as children (r31).

Returning to Poland, supposedly democratic and liberal, she discovered that the new political regime cared very little about “middle-aged” women like her. Ageism and sexism that came along with the new political regime hit Alina hard:

It was fascinating that we finally have democratic transformation, that there is freedom in public life. But when we came back to the country I started to look for jobs... and right away I experienced gender discrimination.... Only 10 years before I wasn't so old... but now it was obvious that position on the labor market was hard to get, even though economically Poland was doing very well (r31).

In her search for job Alina turned to the realm of non-governmental organizations, which, in the 1990s became a professional niche for people like herself:

Women's organizations where the only domain of freedom- among other non-governmental organizations, they were very progressive, and much more leftist. Their progressiveness, comparing to others was very attractive for me (...) At the beginning we were supporting each other and we were counseling each other. A couple years later, nongovernmental organizations, even if unprepared, are going in one direction (r31).

Alina found herself in the midst of the phenomenon that many western and Polish sociologists described as unique to the 1980s and 1990s Eastern Europe: a revival of the "civil society" (Szacki 1997, Arato 1995). In 1995 Andrew Arato argued that in Central Eastern Europe "civil society" re-surfaced as "radical, reformist, or revolutionary strategies of transformation of dictatorships (...) based on autonomous organization of society and the reconstruction of the social ties outside the authoritarian state" (Arato 1995, 19). The emergence of the widespread NGOs movement after communism, as a response to the shrinking and minimal liberal state, is often seen as a continuation of the grassroots activism embodied in the Solidarity movement. Women, as I have shown in the previous chapter, even before the fall of communism began to mobilize against the decomposing authoritarian regime, the results of the neo-liberal economic policies of the new regime, and the reemerging hegemony of the patriarchal and conservative Polish culture. The end of the socialist state became an impulse for even more vigorous

mobilization within the non-governmental sector. This chapter traces the “rise and fall” of NGOs in Poland. I examine the pre- and post- Beijing struggles and argue that in case of Poland, the European Union has become a professionalizing force that impacted the NGOization and cooptation of Polish NGOs by the state. Looking at the case of Poland through the lenses of the Latin American literature on post-Beijing NGOization of women’s movement, I explore the ways in which the European Union’s adjustment policies have led to both a shift of focus of the NGOs and the destabilization of the movement’s solidarity. Finally, I examine strategies of resisting the professionalization and argue that in Poland, many women’s NGOs leaders have adopted a strategy of separating the “public” image of their organization from their personal beliefs. As much as this strategy has been effective in making alliances with the government and supranational intuitions, and obtaining funds for organizations’ survival, it has led to alienating the majority of women’s audience from NGOs work and the departure of younger feminists from the NGO movement.

On the train to Beijing-pre 1995 mobilizations and the arrival of the Western donors

As I have shown in the previous chapter, the abortion debate became a momentum in the development of the service groups and a starting point for the movement toward “feminist” organizing in Poland. As in case of the US and other locations, service organizations’ work focuses on assisting women in the areas in which discrimination has been most immediate and visible (Mueller 1996). In after 1989 Poland such areas included reproductive rights, a lack of protection in the workplace, trafficking and violence against women. At the end of the 1980 and the beginning of the 1990s, many of

women's organizations were established as a reaction to the threat of limitation of women's rights to abortion; "ProFeminia" Association has been active since 1989, NEUTRUM- The Association for the Neutrality of the State has been registered since 1990 and finally Federation for Women and Family Planning the coalition of all organizations fighting on behalf of the women's rights to choose has been active since 1993.

Other service organizations have been approaching the dominance of the newly emerging neo-conservatism of the state by dealing with the immediate results of its policies (or lack of them). Women's unemployment and the lack of job security that was an immediate consequence of the liberalization of the labor market became the subject of work for women in the Center for Promotion of Women, established in 1990. The question of trafficking of women has emerged as a pressing problem throughout the region. La Strada, registered in 1995, was one of the first in the region, a transnational network of women working against sexual violence, forced prostitution with branches in countries such as Ukraine, Macedonia, Moldova, Czech Republic and Poland. Simultaneously local mobilizations against violence against women appeared throughout the region. In Poland the issue of violence against women was addressed among others by the Center for Women's Rights established in 1995.

Along with the "service" organizations, informal groups that focused on consciousness raising and the promoting of feminist ideas continued to be active and often transformed into the non-governmental organizations with "PSF"- Polish Feminist Association established in 1989, and EFKa registered in 1991. Other groups such as "Women Also" in existence from 1993 remained informal but all of them engaged in the

critique of the Polish state's attitude toward women's issues and aimed at entering public debate by building local alliances, establishing political bodies at the national level and reaching out to the supranational institutions. Monitoring the legislation from the gender perspective became one of the most important functions of the local NGOs, like Rural Women's Circles and Polish Women's League. Such organizations, while often disconnected from the organizations active during socialism, have been using their infrastructure and contacts to built alliances with local authorities and public services (police, courts, hospitals etc.) and often times the Church (NWP 16 interview for the NSF). On one hand, women have been engaging in the party and governmental politics. At the national level, Parliamentary Women's Caucus was established in 1990. Up until the 2002 the Caucuses remained an important forum for the cross-party exchange and cooperation between the Parliament and women's NGOs. On the other hand, women's NGOs have been developing counter-hegemonic discourses beyond the state through the activities such as publishing, seminars and conferences at the local level, and by reaching out to supranational institutions such as western donors, the UN and the European Union. Facing alienation from the state, whose institutions became sites of the production of conservative discourses, women reacted by building on the neo-liberal discourse and reaching out to the EU as it embodied such paradigm to counter the state.

Thus the institutionalization and professionalization of the work of the non-governmental institutions was, from early on, linked to the globalization and the "supranationalization" of feminist activism. For Alina, and many other women, the time period before the Beijing conference was particularly busy, fruitful and passionate in terms of developing international capacities. In 1994 women's organizations, including

“Neutrum”, Federation on Women and Family Planning and Center for Women’s Rights, initiated Social Committee of Non-governmental Organizations, which aimed at increasing Polish feminist visibility within transnational women’s organizing. Ewa, the director of one of these organizations, and one of the initiators of the group, recalls that it was her experience of the omission of the Second World region, during the Cairo conference in 1990, that became the major impulse for the mobilization for greater visibility during Beijing Forum. Alina, now a director of the regional women’s coalition engaged in the transnational activism, joined the initiative after the workshops about the women’s activism within the UN organized by Centre for the Promotion of Women in 1994. Later on she got hired to coordinate the preparation of the Shadow Report for the Beijing conference. The group of women working on the report was very diverse- as Ewa recalls, the preparations included lesbians and religious women (although not Catholic women who refused to cooperate with women’s organizations and consequently went to Beijing separately.) The aim of the document was to explore the condition of women’s rights in various areas of life, such as employment, law, health, education and reproduction, and provide real facts and figures concerning women’s issues. Poland, like in many other countries, looked good “on paper” in the area of women’s rights; reality, though, was a different story.

Without a doubt the grass-roots women’s mobilization, that has been emerging since 1985 and intensified within the pre-Beijing period, was an important force behind the will to participate UN process and an international women’s movement. However, it was the arrival of western donors that not only made this participation financially possible, but also brought up new ideas about how the local, national, regional and transnational

cooperation should look like. Already in 1993 the Soros Foundation's funded Stefan Batory's Foundation opened the Women's Program in Warsaw, the unit that has been supporting feminist initiatives and providing grants for NGOs leaders to travel abroad. The participation of many NGO leaders in the Beijing conference was also possible thanks to this program along with the Ford Foundation's, as well as Ebert and Boell Foundation's support. Both Alina and Ewa argue that the building of a solid Eastern European bloc that could be incorporated into the already existing "regional" model became a part of the strategically designed geography of the global women's movement, one that was represented by the western donors. In 1995 international agencies were particularly interested in integration of the newly established women's post-soviet NGOs and in the introduction of the region to the international women's movement as a counterforce for the already emerging resistance of the post-socialist national states against the international equality discourses. Seen from such a perspective, women's mobilization for Beijing conference cannot be seen as solely a bottom up effort. The arrival of the western donors, one might argue, turned Polish women's organization into being part of the process that Sonia Alvarez identifies as "designing the Beijing" (Alvarez 1995, 1998). The supporting of certain groups, of NGOs and certain institutionalized types of women's organizations, as well as the developing of a particular cartography of the international women's movement and of the ways in which world regions have been seen and represented, were crucial elements of this process (Alvarez 1995, 1998).

Like in Latin America, in Poland also the presence of the donors was, without a doubt, an impulse for a integration of the NGOs' efforts. The efforts to consolidate

women's groups were particularly visible around the Beijing conference, the most spectacular of them being putting women from the region together on the train to Beijing. The journey on the Beijing Express took eight days and for many women became a symbol of the transition and unification of women's groups from the region as the workshops, discussions and conversation took place during the ride. In addition, as the government representatives to the Beijing conference took the same train, it served as an incubator of often troubled, relationship between women's NGOs and post-communist states. Finally, it was on the Beijing Express where some of the women's regional networks were initiated. One of them is Karat Coalition, a network of which Alina is now one of the leaders.

“Non-Region”- Beijing conference

As much as the preparation for the conference has become a milestone in the process of integration of feminists in Poland, the participation in Hairou forum presented Polish activists with unexpected challenges, and the Beijing Conference to a certain extent turned out to be a disappointment. First of all, as they noticed after the arrival at Hairou, NGOs forum and tents were organized around the regional- thematic fields, but Central Eastern European pavilion was not there, it seemed like the organizers did not consider Eastern European post-socialist countries a region. The notion of “Non-Region” became symbolic of the status of women from Eastern Europe- they at the same time were linked through their experience of state-socialism and transformation and non-existing within the framework of the transnational women's activism. Facing the lack of a space designated for them to gather, women from the region initiated a provisional regional tent, with Joanna Regulska's hand-written name on the entrance to it. As Joanna recalls,

in yet another effort at making the non-region visible, the CEE women took down the “Western Europe” sign and turned it into simply “Europe”, attaching it to the corner in which they all gathered. In spite of these creative solutions to incorporate the post-socialist country into the conference space, the “non-region” remained homeless within the NGOs forum and invisible at the UN conference itself. The authors of the “Statement of non-region” recall their weeks-long efforts to contribute to the Platform of Action from the perspective of post-socialist countries. Their all-night-long informal sessions in their hotel room in Beijing, full of struggles between various women’s interests and historic resentments, resulted nevertheless in producing the “Statement from the “non-region” women’s groups. However, the authors of this document faced yet another challenge while trying to present it at the Conference itself. Their statement has been sent away a number of times during the conference. The UN representatives kept re-assuring the representatives of the post-socialist countries that the time and venue for them to speak will be soon available. However, the last day of the conference came without these promises being fulfilled. Luckily the Bahai Association gave up their time and space to provide the “non-region” women to present their cause.

The Polish government, some members of which, like Irena Boruta, maintained friendly relationships with the NGOs, was not interested in building a regional platform either. Ewa argues that in Beijing, Polish officials had already had different goals set up for the international political agenda. The Polish government, as some other post-communist governments, had been already “looking up” to the Polish membership in the EU. Polish officials thus focused rather on emphasizing the “Europeness” of the Polish politics than its eastern European specificities. As the ability and prospects of accession

for some countries in the region were already on the horizon, the new division between the EU candidate countries and the “others” emerged. Polish government, and in some cases Polish women’s organizations, were no longer interested in forming coalitions throughout the region, and attempted to distance themselves from the unlikely candidates for the EU membership, that is, the countries east of Poland.

Although many women from Central and Eastern Europe put a lot of effort to mark their presence in Beijing, including the creation of their own tents, the sense of the Central and Eastern Europe’s “non-regionality” was becoming more and more apparent. Some of the activists involved in the Beijing process are now arguing that, in a sense, Central Eastern European feminist NGOs have “missed the boat” of the international women’s movement. Although socialist countries’ delegates were present at previous UN conference, there was also been little or no connectivity between the Polish feminist organizations that emerged after 1989 on one hand, and women who represented socialist states at the UU forum before 1989. The dynamics of the international women’s movement had been set way before the Beijing conference, in Cairo and Copenhagen:

When it came to the women from the developing countries, they started much earlier, about 20 years. The international feminism has been visible since Nairobi in 1984, and it was well established (in Beijing) (r11)

Moreover the dialogue between Western (Northern) and Southern (Eastern) women have been focusing on the colonial and post-colonial past. The experience of colonialism that has been framed around processes of “racialization,” slavery and “neocolonial” practices of some Western countries and some Western feminists, was foreign to the experience of the Second World women. Some of my interviewees, not without bitter indignation, suggest that the colonial and neo-colonial relationship is responsible for more interest and

more attention being paid to the Third World women's situation:

I have experience with the Third World women who are very intellectual and it was easier for them to build their identity based upon the North-South dichotomy. As we all know the situation in the South is dramatically different, because of the whole cultural, political and economic context. I think that the western guilt towards South has played a crucial role here. The feeling that Americans have had is that they are responsible for the Third World countries situation, as a society, and it is their responsibility to support them. Because of that there were more initiatives to support Third World women's movements, the relationship was more intensive, there was much more resources. It was easier of define problems and it was easier to find similarities at the same time (r11)

Representation of the "transitional" countries in such a polarized environment was very hard:

When it came to our region, we were generally "late" and there was no interest in our region, there was responsibility, no feeling that they owe us something in the global sense. And thus apart from Network of East-West women, there were no initiatives. So the pressure to include us was lower. Moreover while everything was already defined in the south-north paradigm it was extremely hard for the transitioning countries to enter this paradigm (r11)

An important factor responsible for the unsuitability of the Central Eastern European countries was their trajectory from socialism to capitalism, in which the Western capitalism was often times represented as a positive force, countering the hegemonic, anti-democratic socialist regimes. The identification with the West intersected with the trouble that many Second World women have with relating to the issues raised by the Third World women. Some, like Ewa, argued that Central Eastern European women did not have the same basic human rights problems as women from Africa, Asia or Latin America. The reluctance to identify with the developing countries did at the same time coincide with the sense of regional superiority:

Our own attitude has been important too, the fact that women from our region have a very distinct feeling of their own particularity, and they are proud of being different. I don't want to say it has been a feeling of superiority, but the idea that we have our advantages, that some problems, even in relationship to the western countries, we didn't have. For instance the property laws, we had them and didn't have to fight for them. So we had some kind of feelings of superiority, which translated into being disregarding. Although we all know this successes are very superficial, and we did not succeed in changing the social structure entirely, and it all fell together with the fall of communism (...) But we had advantages. And it was our difference from the west and from the developing countries, the fact that we do not have certain problems such as education, illiteracy (r11)

As a result, even though the women's organizations from the region managed, given the short timeline, to contribute to the Platform of Action and thus mark their presence at the international space, the already established global distinction between the North and South has been conceptualized in the way enabling the verbalization of the specificity of the region. These lines of exclusions have been deepening with time:

I can say that I observe regress. At the beginning of the 1990s, around Beijing we were able to communicate our specificity, the need to "take care" of the region. But after Beijing plus 5 and Beijing plus 10 were are back to the South-North division and we are drowning in the dualism of the world again (r11).

Post-Beijing struggles

Though Charlotte Bunch, a feminist theorist and an international NGOs professional, declared Hairou to be a "global town meeting" of women, Manisha Desai rightly noted that "some women clearly had greater access to the town's coffers and the town male elders than others" (Desai 2005). One of the crucial questions asked within the context of post- Beijing transnational feminist movement is that of NGOization of the women's movement locally and transnationally (Alvarez 1995, 1998, Desai 2005). The growing

disparity between the various groups of women, including the gap between women's NGOs and the women's "masses" that they were supposed to represent, has become one of the most important struggles in the post-Beijing world. Like in other locations, particularly in Latin America, the Beijing conference impacted the trajectory of the women's organizations in Poland both locally and globally. Over time, many experts working in the region have been identifying the professional non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as a driving force behind women's mobilizations and the single agents of change in the area of women's rights in Poland after Beijing (Ghodsee 2004, Grabowska, Mizieleńska, Regulska 2002, Gal and Kligman 2000, Keck and Sikkink 2005, Lukić, Regulska, and Zaviršek 2006, Einhorn, Sever 2003). NGOs not only dominated the feminist movement, established themselves at the position of the representatives of the movement, but also managed to create networks within the women's movement's supranationally and with the outside political actors at various geographical level. In "Globalization, Transnationalism and Civil Society" Sonia Alvarez argues that for Latin America, Beijing became a focal point for the transformation of the feminist movements from singular to plural (Alvarez 1998). One of the most important impacts of the Beijing conference was re-shaping the feminist agenda; the involvement in the international feminist discourse marked the empowering of a new type of women's organizations: professional feminist NGOs. The utilization of the language of the "gender equality" led to the conceptualization of women's oppression in more general terms; on the one hand, the demand of "gender equality" was supposed to represent the language to apply to all groups of women, regardless their sexuality, class or race. In addition, "women rights as human rights" paradigm allowed representation of gender equality as a

part of a broader struggle for social justice. The message sent by the new feminist discourses was that women's rights seen as human rights and gender social justice were not exclusively about women, or specific groups of women, but about basic principles of human life and dignity as well quality of democratic society as a whole. On the other hand, the newly emerged "gender mainstreaming" rhetoric, geared toward policymaking, the marked moving away from service feminism and community based organizing. In this frame, issues such as abortion or poverty are no longer argued to be historically specific and feminism focused, but as instances of the more broadly defined framework of human rights and the rights of citizens. While their position as representatives of women and women's movement vis-a-vis the state and supranational institutions was growing, simultaneous processes of internal disintegration and a growing gap between NGOs and "real" women were taking place.

In this section, I propose to look at the post-Beijing NGOization of the Polish feminist movement, and argue that to understand this process, we have to take a series of factors into account. Like in the Latin America, the conference and the Hairou women's NGOs forum were the turning point for the feminist movement. However, the process of institutionalization of feminism has to be seen more as a contextualized phase of the feminist trajectories, which is a direct effect of the "europeization" of the women's movement. In Poland, the post-Beijing reconfiguration of the feminist movement, most visible in the process of transformation from "service" organizations to "professional" feminist NGOs that are more broadly invested in the promotion of the general "gender equality", has been shaped uniquely by the presence of the EU. Initially, the arrival of the EU has been representing the symbolic unification of the European feminism. However,

early on, the EU started impacting women's mobilizations by imposing the "adjustment" discourses and governmentality paradigm on feminist activism. Finally, the EU has been stipulating the cooperation with the state upon the women's NGOs. Such a changed course of the feminist activism has been in the direct opposition to many feminist leaders' ideals because it challenged their hesitance toward the cooperation with the state, often inherent from socialism. In Poland the NGOs' cooperation with state was, in many respects, mediated through the women's involvement supranationally and their engagement in the EU accession. Globalization, represented by the European Union, and embedded in the eastern enlargement, opened up new possibilities for the development of the networks and social movements web, particularly through multi-organizational partnership, cooperation with certain government units, and through reaching out to the organizations working at the EU level.

The arrival of the EU also raised suspicions toward economy oriented, individualistic, and educational type of activism promoted by the EU. Within the accession process, and facing the multiple struggles with the financial crisis and conservative state policies, many of women's NGOs thus employed a pragmatic stance on the cooperation with both the EU and the state. As they held on to their socialist ideals personally, they started subscribing to the new governmentality and the neo-liberal paradigm institutionally. But the criticism toward the EU has been raised by both the supranational regional women's coalition and younger women. They argued that both the competitive nature of the EU funds and the economic orientation of the new NGOs' activism have resulted in a disintegration of feminism in Poland.

EU adjustment discourse and the possibility of the European feminism

Initially the European Union represented the possibility of a new supranational identity for the Polish feminist movement and an alternative to the transnational feminism at the UN forum. In her interview within the NSF project, “Constructing Supranational Political Spaces”, Ewa argued:

In 2002 we decided that for the candidate countries from Central Europe, integration with the EU is more important (...) We knew the mechanisms and we had experience with the European Union, we could use them to be active at the EU level (NWP9)

While the arrival of the EU had become a “second chance” for the Polish feminism to act transnationally, the new language and new meanings of “gender equality” and “gender social justice” had to be constructed. Simultaneously, new concepts as well as new cultural and legal practices had to be introduced, implemented, tested and reinforced. The incorporation of the EU standard became a priority for both the Polish government and Polish women’s organizations as it constituted the condition of the symbolic confirmation of the Polish European identity. However, the European belonging required serious “adjustments” not only on the part of Polish law, but also of feminist practices.

Although the concept has its roots in the UN process, in Poland the arrival of the “gender mainstreaming” discourses has been closely related to the EU accession process. In Polish and EU literature and feminist practices, “gender mainstreaming” has been presented as deriving from both the second wave feminist activism and the economic origins of the European community, particularly Western European governments’ efforts to establish transnational European market economy (Howell 2003, Hoskyns 1996a and b., Teutsch and Grabowska 2004). Combined efforts of feminists and government officials in Western Europe, in Eastern Europe have been represented as responsible for the introduction of the EU hard laws and directives that regulate “equal treatment” in

relation to labor market (these directives were established by European Commission between 1975-1996) (European Commission, 1999). In the eyes of many feminist activists European Union took its commitment to “gender equality” one-step further than the UN. In light of the previous experiences of marginalization within the transnational women’s movement at the UN, for many Polish feminists the EU represented an attractive alternative for the supranational activism. Moreover, referring to the European political tradition, identity and history, to which Poles have always aspired, the EU symbolized cultural unity of the continent.

In spite of the political declarations, however, neither European Union’s politicians nor Western European feminists seem to be willing to leave the East-West divisions behind. Throughout the whole accession period between 1994-2004, the literature on European Union’s political identity- both mainstream and feminist- frames the enlargement of the Union and the implementation of the European union gender equality standards in candidate countries as part of the “europeization” and the “adjustment” of the Eastern Europe. Within this process, a convergence of the “less developed” countries was crucial to the European unity (Greven and Pauly 2000, Bukowski, Piattoni, Smyrl 2003). The level of “development” has been a major measure of the “europeization” of the new Europeans; some of the countries in Central Europe were considered more European than others (Poland versus Ukraine)¹⁶. Following the

¹⁶ For instance, in his examination of issues that are connected to the EU Eastern Enlargement, Peter Gowan proposes a geographical division of the Central and Eastern Europe based upon the previous attachments to the Soviet Bloc and the closeness to the border between it and the Western Europe. For Gowan, Central European countries form a sort of a cluster or what he calls the “frontier belt” (Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia). These countries, according to Gowan, are “frontiers” because due to their geographical position, close to the more “developed” countries such as Germany and Austria, they are perceived as most interested in and most ready for the process of “europeization”. For Gowan, not surprisingly, the essential part of the “europeization process” is the ability to follow the economic standards of the European Union’s free market (Gowan, 2002).

order that puts economy before politics, many authors perceive the level of the democratization of the CEE countries as a function of the economic development (Gowan 2002). These authors have defined some aspects, such as the candidate countries' government resistance to follow the European Union politics on human rights, examples of which were discrimination against Roma population in the Czech Republic and/or women's rights in Poland and Estonia, as proofs of underdevelopment of the potential new EU members.

While more sensitive about a variety of factors that impact the countries' resistance toward implementing "equal opportunities" approach, the feminist analysis of the European Union "gender mainstreaming" policies rarely considered the specific differences between women in east and west Europe in terms of diversity. Equal opportunities politics has been a subject of endless feminist critiques of feminist activists and scholars, but none of them mentioned the differences between various European regions. European feminists pointed, for example, to the narrowness of the "mainstream" politics and illuminated its limitations for the women's position at the labor market (Ellina 2003, Elman 2001, Liebert 1999 and 2003, Lombardo, Verloo, Meier 2008 Watson 2003). Such reductionism makes a discussion about the origins and cultural aspects of the discrimination impossible. Many argued that by cutting off the discussion about women's health and reproductive rights, the European Union politics thus reestablishes the division between public and private and focuses only on the equation of women and men in the public sphere (Liebert 1999, Hoskyns 1996, Woodward 2003). Moreover, some European feminist scholars argued that the European Union "mainstream" politics consists of a certain model of "identity politics" that ignores

differences between women. The EU hard laws regulate only women's position on the labor market, while leaving other areas of discrimination untouched. In these spheres of politics, such as migration politics, the state's relation to certain churches that EU does not consider include into its policies e women's position often vary drastically from men's. They are predominantly subjects of illegal migration and trafficking and religious fundamentalist's laws (Hoskyns 1996). Finally, feminist critiques questioned the idea of the institutionalization and beurocratization of the European Union feminism (Ellina 2003). By incorporating feminism into the life of EU institutions, they argue, takes away the political agency from nongovernmental institutions and limits the growth of the civil society (Liebert, 1999).

The majority of those critiques, however, is narrowly focused on "western" Europe. The critics never raise the question how the European Union equal opportunities politics will have to change after the Eastern Enlargement. What are the differences that women from CEE will make in the way in which this politics, its priorities and areas of concentrations, are determined? What are the mechanism to make the particular Central Eastern European women's experience visible and to make politics of "mainstreaming" work for them? Will labor market based politics work for women who live in the countryside and are farmers (this is the case of 1/3 of women in Poland)? Does it resolve the problem of illegal, but widely accessible, abortion (the case of Poland) (NSF project data 2003)? None of these questions are the subject of consideration either for the European Union equal opportunities officials (NSF project data, 2003), nor for "western" European feminists.

Within most of the EU literature on women and politics, the “European identity” is understood as intellectual, cultural and historical “property” of western Europeans. Eastern European countries can aspire, desire and eventually become Europeans, but they are not considered *the* Europeans¹⁷. Many western European scholars see European Union as consequence of a postwar re-incarnation and unification of the continent, from which socialist countries had been significantly absent. This absence, however, is rarely part of the EU narrative (Kostakopoulou 2001; Greven and Pauly 2000; Hoskyns and Newman 2000). While the EU literature conceptualizes regional differences in terms of their economic development, (Kostakopoulou 2001) the questions of historic and geopolitical lines of inclusion/ exclusion are rarely addressed, which does not mean they are totally absent (Woodward 2003, Kostakopoulou 2001). These questions are rather they unspoken, hidden and justified by the economic jargon. The framing of differences between east and west in terms of economic underdevelopment allows not only representation of the nationalist tendencies as part of the failed economies, but also justifies the need for europeization. Interestingly enough, some authors, both Polish and EU go as far as using the term “expansion” in reference to the Eastern Enlargement (Cowles et. al 2000 Jasiecki 2008). One can only anticipate from such a framing that the understanding that for the “(western) Europe” that represents the “unification” (civilized) ideal, Eastern Europe remains a threat as “other”, different, a not yet European part of the continent.

¹⁷ One of the important trends in the region, which one literature on the European Union democracy mentions, is to use the model of deliberative democracy as how the ideal of transnational European political sphere should look like (Habermas 1992), (Kostakopoulou 2001). The uniqueness of the European Union case consist of its supranational character and the urgency to cross the borders of the national states (Kostakopoulou 2001) (Bukowski, Piattoni, Smyrl 2003). But how will the democracy beyond the national state look like? (Greven and Pauly 2000). Is the global democracy with different (national) treatment of the citizens possible? (Greven 2000).

After the brief period of what can be called Euro-enthusiasm, Polish women's activists faced significant questions considering their identity: What is the specificity of the Central Eastern Europe? And how does this specificity influence particular politics, agencies and subjectivity formation? The data collected with the NSF-funded project revealed that many NGOs leaders have been experiencing various types of exclusion to which, assuming the western character of the European Union and the need for the post-socialist countries to adjust, was crucial. In the interview within the NSF project Ewa argued:

The need to cooperate was ours', NGOs initiative. Much earlier (then western European women) we realized that women in the EU should cooperate. But they were not ready; they thought it is only for them- only for the Union's women. Later on for the financial reasons, they opened up, they decided they want us (NWP7)

And in the interview with me, Alina concurred:

For one of the very first meeting organized by our regional coalition about the UE politics- it was in Krakow 3 years ago in 2002- the representatives of the EWL and WIDE arrived. During lunch one of the woman from our region asked them what benefits will European Union bring to women in her countries. And one of the EWL leaders replied: "The problem is that you cannot, as non-members even ask for the membership in the EWL". After the meeting we reflected on it and realized that it is yet another form of exclusion, and that we don't want to be "second class citizens" in the European Union. One of us even asked the EWL leader how knowing that we will eventually become part of the EU, she can not even consider inviting us to their "exclusive club" (r16).

New Governmentality. The raise of the professional feminism in Poland

The identity struggles intersected with the arrival of the new paradigm of feminist activism. The new governmentality approach promoted by the European Union focused

on educating women in politics, economy and their rights, as well as produced a demand for a new type of feminist activist - an expert in “gender mainstreaming”. The development of the NGOs was no longer a spontaneous process as it was even in the mid 1990s that feminists can be said to have become the EU’s tools for the dissemination of “gender equality” paradigm promoted by the European Union. The way how the NGOs have been transforming from the grassroots community groups to mainstream organizations, with a strong connection to both the state and international institutions, is clearly visible in the following the trajectory of OSKa (Women’s Information Center), one of the most active women’s organizations in Poland during the 1998-2007.

The organization started as the National Women’s Information Center and was funded in 1996 as a “spin-off” of the Soros Foundation project on developing the database of women’s activism in Poland. Between 1995-1996, two of feminist activists, Barbara Limanowska and Roma Ciesla, were „in the field“ collecting information about local women’s mobilization. OSKa - Women’s Information Center - emerged as a follow up of this project. Initially the role of the Center was to connect women’s organizations and initiatives across the country and serve as a platform for women’s intellectual development and support. Since 1997 until 2007, OSKa’s office was a crucial space of the feminist exchange in Poland. It published a feminist monthly journal (*Kalendarium*) that informed about the activities of all women’s groups around the country, about seminars, conferences, grants as well as about books and important, gender equality related events in Poland and abroad (Regulska and Grabowska 2007, *Kalendarium OŚKa Informuje* 1998-2006).

Finally, the Center was an organizer of a number of meetings and seminars, most importantly the Annual Women's Conference „The Government Politics on Women“. Besides the conference, OSKa's office was a venue of feminist discussions (published as a book under the title *Feminist Meetings*), book promotions and of countless informal gatherings. As it broadened the scope of its activities, OSKa also developed institutionally. By the late 1990s, it had a number of programs, employees and the organizational hierarchy with a director, advisory board, volunteers and project managers. By the 2002-2003, it had been an established actor in the Polish public space with a large web of relations with smaller organization in all regions of Poland, contacts with Paramilitary Women Caucus and the Plenipotentiary of the Equal Status of Women and Men.

As Joanna Regulska and I argued elsewhere (Regulska and Grabowska 2007), the arrival of the EU was a critical factor in shaping the discourse and activities of the NGOs in the period after Beijing. Based on the analysis of the Calendar of Events, we argued to distinguish three phases/processes through which the EU politics impacted feminist agency in Poland: 1.) Introducing: January 1997- September 1999; 2.) Informing: October 1999 - December 2001; and 3.) Engaging and Creating Partnerships: January 2002 - December 2004. Like many other NGOs, already in the late 1990's OSKa's language was strongly influenced by the international discourse of "gender mainstreaming" and „gender equality“. Many women's groups shifted their focus from immediate assistance to policy-oriented projects. Others added the "gender mainstreaming" focus to their "service" tasks. In the late 1990s, the "new governmentality" language dominated the NGOs self-identity. Many of redirected their

focus toward “gender mainstreaming” that included creating equal opportunities between sexes through “information, advocacy, lobbying and training courses, all of which are approached with the gender perspective (from OSKa’s information brochure). Moreover “introducing gender mainstreaming into state policies”, “making gender a main concern of institutions” and “including gender perspective in all aspects of the society” have emerged as important organizational objectives (from OSKa’s information brochure). Drafting social policies on gender, gathering information on gender, training different target groups with respect to gender and consolidating a network of collaborators to increase participation of women in decision making processes have become a the major NGOs activities.

The implementation of the “gender mainstreaming” required a new set of tools and strategies, for which grassroots mobilization and immediate assistance were no longer central. Participation in creating national policies, working in local, national, transnational coalitions, producing research, providing education and training in respect to gender equality as well as producing, translating and disseminating information about gender equality have emerged as the major organization’s activities (from OSKa’s information brochure). According to the numbers gathered for the above mentioned analysis of the activities of OSKa in the period between 1997-1999, Conferences (10) and seminars/workshops (10) emerged as the two main tools. These meetings and trainings focused on the introduction of the Union and explanation of what kind of rights women have in the EU and how these rights are protected (29% of the entries) (OSKa 1997a: 13-14). Introducing the meaning of the EU economic policies for women and explaining the basic facts about accession process were the next two most important themes (21% each).

The EU policies toward equality and equal treatment were initially of lower interest, and only later emerged as a priority (17%). Questioning what role women's and feminist NGOs should and could play vis-a-vis the EU represented the fourth distinguishable category (12%). Between 1999-2001, the increasing number of conferences (16) and meetings, seminars and workshops (13) begin to address the effects of the European Union accession for women: at the labor market (45%), on their position in politics (35%) and of their legal rights. In 2000 and 2001, three big information and publication initiatives were started: 1) the publication of all EU documents on equal rights translated by the Center for Women's Rights (CWR 2000), 2) publication of the EU Manual for Women (OSKa, 2001), and 3) the Polish edition of 100 words about equality between women and men (Karat Coalition, 2000) (Regulska, Grabowska 2007).

In her analysis of the 1990s feminisms in Latin America, Sonia Alvarez argues that while for the post 1995 activists implementing the Beijing Platform became a full time job, it still meant very little for everyday life of many women. The European Adjustment funds, like EQUALL and ACCESS, were major financial tools through which the new governmentality agenda have been promoted. Similarly to what happened in Latin America, the adjustment processes in Poland impacted the evolution of women's movement and resulted in the emphasis on issues such as "self help", "personal development", "management" and "active citizenship", "project development", as well as "policy assessment" (Alvarez 1995, 1998). The "governmentality" paradigm also introduced a new "sit down" model of feminism in which to be an active feminist thus meant to participate in workshops, conferences, and "strategic planning". Like in Latin America, in post-Beijing Poland the seminar/conference type of activism translated into

the model in which the educated, middle class women “teach” poor women about how to deal with the situation that they themselves never experienced. However, the newly introduced language conceptualized social capital and mobilization in terms of the management (leadership) and resource mobilization. As such, it depoliticized and economicized the idea of social justice and introduced new forms of power relations and disciplining and eventually led often to crisis of internal and external accountability of the NGOs. Access to international resources, both financial and discursive, enabled feminist organizations to gather the information and maintain the staff devoted entirely to lobbying and monitoring the introduction of “gender mainstreaming” into Polish politics. NGOs became workplaces with strictly defined tasks and power structure. In addition, NGOs entering the institutionalized public sphere resulted in an uneven distribution of power and access to these resources, which generated a number of conflicts and challenges to for the competition between NGOs over funds (Mizielinska 2008b) and for feminism as such. In such sense, the arrival of the EU has become responsible not only for the growing gap between feminists and “real” women, but also for contributing to a broader crisis bordering on the disintegration of the feminist movement in Poland. This is because the organizations, as they became privileged and indispensable interlocutors within the international exchange between the state and supranational agencies, faced the tempting opportunity to “flirt with the mainstream”. The process of professionalization and specialization resulted on the one hand in the channeling of the feminist efforts into the building of the structure; on the other hand, the same process represented a new focus of the feminist politics -- the state.

Pragmatic “state feminism” cooptation and absorption of the NGO movement

In many European Union countries, the emphasis on institutions and bureaucracy in introducing “gender equality” has led to increased presence of *femocrats* within both state and supranational structures¹⁸. Poland, like almost all of the EU candidate countries between 1996-2001, had established some type of women’s rights institutions, as they felt obliged to at least paying a lip service to the equal rights agenda. Although the Polish authorities signed the Platform of Action and agreed to follow the EU’s gender policies, initially all post-socialist Polish governments showed quite a strong resistance to any changes in the traditional “gender contract” (Fuszara 2000 and 2006). Depending on the political party they represented, some governments claimed the existence of a certain legal protection, while others proclaimed their protectorate over the Polish “cultural practices”. With the advancement of negotiations it became clear that the “acquis” has to be taken seriously, and the EU requirements cannot be followed only “on paper”. Some important political decisions, such as changing of the Polish Labor code in 2002, and the re-establishment of the Office of the Plenipotentiary of Government for the Equal Status of Women and Men, were made particularly after 2001 when the left wing government came to power. The Plenipotentiary, former head of the League of Polish Women, Izabella Jaruga- Nowacka, was very keen on rebuilding links and collaborations with women’s NGOs. Among the most significant aspects of the new image of the Plenipotentiary were: 1) close co-operation with NGOs in order to develop and implement the second stage of the National Plan of Action for Women; 2) nation-wide

¹⁸ At the level of institutions (in the European Commission: DG Employment- Unit of Equal Opportunities between Women and Men in Parliament: Equal Right Committee) and at the level of the civil society (according to the EU model the community finances the existence of one professional, European NGOs platform in every branch of the society; in case of women the lobbying body at the EU level is European Women’s Lobby) (Becelar, 1999).

campaign with the National Labor Inspectorate focused on dissemination of legal approaches to equal treatment of women and men; 3) initiation of a grant competition for NGOs -Equal Rights-Equal Opportunities, and 4) introduction of changes in the way in which statistics are kept by the Ministry of Justice in order to include a new category of gender discrimination (Mizielinska 2003).

Like in other locations, in Poland a closer cooperation with the state raised important questions about the relations between “non-governmental” sector and the state. While the NGOization, professionalization and mainstreamization have been intersecting with the transnationally mediated process of co-optation of feminism by the state, many women’s NGOs activists asked if the feminist movement became an instance of cooptation or “state feminism”. Should feminism be part of the mainstream politics? Or should it remain on the outskirts of the governmental politics?

Feminist theorists vary in their opinion about to what extent feminism should engage with the state. For Marxist feminists, the state constructs, reflects and perpetuates gender hierarchies and inequalities (McKinnon 1989) through the re-distribution of resources - most profoundly welfare- regulation of women’s reproduction and the ideology of separate women’s (private- reproductive) and men’s (public- productive) spheres (Barret 1992). Inherently the patriarchal state is unable to act as an agent of change. As such the state is perceived as an instrument of the “ruling class” (MacKinnon 1989), as institutionalized patriarchy, too unitary and homogeneous to satisfactorily engage with the issues raised by feminism (Allen 1990). Other feminist scholars, however, problematize such approach arguing that the “state feminism” does not have to be an oxymoron (Mazur 2001). They suggest that if the aim of the feminist theory and

practice is to generate social change, we cannot ignore the state, both as a concept and as a system of political institutions and practices (Franzway, Court, Connel 1989). One of the crucial questions in such conceptualized relationship between state and feminism is if feminism needs a state at all (Franzway, Court, Connel 1989, Valiente 2001, Waylen 1996, Kantola and Outshoorn, 2007). Is feminism always against the state? Should we see the state as a bureaucratic machinery that can be used to regulate the distribution of goods and assist the least fortunate? What is the value of the beyond state political activism and what is a feminist definition of the state? What are the political spaces beyond the state? (Rai 1996, Allen 1990)?¹⁹.

The cooperation between women's movement and the state can emerge at different levels and vary in its intensity (Dahlerup 1987), which is illustrated by the number of feminist studies of "state feminism in Ireland (Borchorst 1995), Italy (Guadagini 1995), Poland (Robinson 1995) and Canada (Vickers, 2003). In Scandinavian literature state feminism, or the "feminism from above", is defined as both "feminists employed as administrators and bureaucrats in positions of power and women politicians advocating gender equality policies (Aalton and Holli 1995, Bergvist 1995, Siim, 1994). Jane Mansbridge argues that we should see the process of cooptation by the state as one of the stages of the feminist movement's development, one that simultaneously constitutes the greatest danger for the feminist "internal accountability"

¹⁹ Some scholars argue that feminist engagement with the state requires looking at different kinds of policies from the perspective of constructing and regulating gender relations and seeing policies as emerging from battles that take place in the arena of the state and beyond (Charlton 1989). Such approaches are informed by Foucault's conceptualization of the state not as a monolithic construct but rather a diversity of actors and arenas. Thus it is important in constructing gender power relations at different levels (Watson 1990) Crucial to many feminist theories of state is also the discrepancy between feminist theory and praxis. While the majority of feminist theory claims its alienation from the state, emphasizing the inherently patriarchal character of state institutions, practitioners prefer to see the state as something out there, which should not be ignored (Watson 1990).

(Mansbridge 1995, 31) and indicates the advancement of the feminist movement (creation of jobs and public demand for the feminist presence in the mainstream)²⁰.

Stetson and Mazur argue that the concept of “state feminism” neither refers to the welfare state, nor to the liberal state, but is a particular form of institutionalization of feminism in both the economical, political, but also ideological sense. (Stetson and Mazur 1995)

According to these authors, in order to come into practice, the “state feminism” has to fulfill two conditions. First, the state structures assigned by political leaders to address women’s inferior position in society should contribute to policies that reduce gender-based inequalities and provide an opportunity for women’s movement activists to influence feminist policy formation. Second, the abilities of these state structures to promote feminist political agenda vary in a different political, social, and context (Stetson and Mazur 1995). In practice, the state feminism requires government structures to be formally engaged with furthering women’s status and rights and different kinds of policies from the perspective of constructing and regulating gender relations and seeing policies as emerging from “battles which take place in the arena of the state” (Stetson and Mazur 1995, p.7).

The European Union’s “equal opportunities” politics and the practice of “mainstreaming” meets the majority of definitions of the “feminism from the above” (Stenson and Mazur 1995). The importance of the “equal opportunities” politics is recognized in the major documents of the Union (Amsterdam Treaty # 19) and its

²⁰ Many feminist authors point to the dangers of the mainstreamization of feminism in Australia, some European countries as well as the European Union itself (Mazur 1996). According to such analysis, in the state, bureaucratic model, feminism becomes a commodity, and the existence of the women’s movement depends increasingly on sponsoring, of outside partnerships, the ability to compromise, and consist on a certain double loyalty of feminist activists to the movement and to the state (Mazur 1996). Others perceive the emergence of the “state feminism” as a direct consequence of the second wave’s goal to politicize women’s issues (Howell Franzway, 1986). The practice of the “state feminism” emerged as a consequence of incorporation of some feminist goals into the state politics.

intuitional structure²¹. The EU's model of "state feminism" implemented into Poland could thus potentially become a strategy of turning the state into an activist tool. This happens by embedding gender issues in national policy agendas and giving advocates for the advancement of women permanent access to arenas of power (Stetson and Mazur 1995, p.5). In case of Polish feminists brief flirtation with the state in the context of the Eastern European enlargement has been strictly pragmatic, on both sides that of the state and of women's activists.

The inclusion of the NGOs into the state politics, proposed by both the EU and the Polish state, was rather symbolic. In case of the EU, a lack of commitment to the inclusion of the NGOs into the negotiation process revealed its superficial character when the directors of both the Employment (responsible for implementation of "gender mainstreaming" in candidate countries) and Enlargement Directorate could not remember the names of the biggest women's organizations in Poland (Regulska and Grabowska 2008). In case of the Polish state, the involvement of other non-governmental and non-state actors, particularly of the Catholic Church, into politics both nationally and transnationally, interferes with the governments' will to cooperate with women's NGOs. Within the EU negotiation process, the Catholic Church had been constantly destabilizing the growing position of the feminist NGOs in the public sphere, significantly limiting the process of cooptation. Even during the short period of the governments' "flirting" with feminism, women's movements' efforts were counterbalanced by the governments'

²¹ The uniqueness of the case of the European Union's "state feminism" is that it works at the supranational level and aims at regulating the position of men and women in the national states. Its goal is to engage different levels of territoriality and various, state and non-state political actors (Leitner 1997, NSF project data). It changes the way of thinking about the political sphere and public space by going beyond the borders of national space and transforming it to dynamic, territorially flexible state borders rather than static ones, the state borders geographically limited by the nation state. It thus might be considered an example of what geographers call the jumping scale (Jones, 1998, NSF project).

attempt to maintain a pragmatic alliance with the Catholic Church that still remains a powerful political force in Poland. Neither the EU, nor the Polish state have ever controlled the Catholic Church in Poland, and its area of particular interests - women's reproductive rights – have never become as a part of the EU agenda. To the contrary, the Catholic Church and the Polish state have built a partnership that has been strategically used. For example, in the effort to secure a high level of support and a “yes” vote on the accession referendum, the Polish government entered into an agreement with the Catholic Church in return for silencing the efforts to change the anti-abortion law that is one of the most restrictive in Europe. Thus the Catholic Church offered to support the accession referendum and actively campaigned for a “yes” vote.

Yet, as the data from NSF project revealed women's organizations believed that they could also collaborate and partner with the state institutions. They supported both the leftist government and the EU accession partially in the hope to regain the reproductive rights for women:

During the negotiation, the government attitude was that the most important thing is to enter the EU, and women's issues can be addressed sometime in the future. But we got anxious about it, we started to question this perspective in which, first we have to get other things done and after we can talk about women's rights (...) We wanted to enter the EU with the modern abortion law, and the law that is adjusted to what is going on in the Western Europe (NWP 12)

The leftist government, however, in spite of its 2000 election campaign's promise to “take care” of the abortion law, withdrew its support in the last minute. The former prime minister's change of mind on abortion, practically overnight, had, many argued, a lot to

do with securing the Catholic Church's support for the EU accession. One of the women's NGO's activists described this surprising switch of the Polish government in the midst of the EU accession as follows:

There was a rumor about the agreement between the Church and the state. At first we couldn't believe something like that happened, but all of the signs showed that the prime minister changed his mind about the abortion law overnight (...). Women's organizations were shocked, and we decided to present our position on what happened. We prepared an open letter to the European Parliament, a letter that was available in the Internet and published in major media. This really worked? (NWP12)

Because Polish feminist's NGO's cooperation with the state institutions, mostly due to the presence of some of the feminist activists in the government, Poland represents rather an instance of the "absorption" of the ideas into government policies than the cooptation of the movement or "state feminism. It seem like in practice all the actors involved - the EU, the state and the NGOs- approached the idea of the "state feminism" in Poland rather as a pragmatic set of political moves than a possibility of the some real coalition between the state, the EU and the feminist movement. Thus the Polish institutionalization of the feminist movement in many ways does not fit feminist approaches to state feminism. It seems to be showing that the pragmatic choices of feminists, rather than ideological decisions about the role of the state, dominated the relations with the state. In the context of Latin America, Sonia Alvarez argues that the inclusion of women's issues agent into the instutionalized discourse cannot be seen solely as a process of co-optation, within which male political elites "decide" to incorporate some equality discourses into the existing status quo (Alvarez 1995, 1998, 2000) Rather, as Alvarez argues, the case of the Latin American countries represents an instance of the "absorption" of feminist ideas,

the process in which the inclusion of the women's issues into the public discourse is an effect of the agency of women's groups and allows the subaltern, marginal discourses to influence the mainstream cultural politics from outside. According to this approach, absorption, unlike co-optation, implies agency and is not a one-sided process of "selling out" feminist activism. On the contrary, it exemplifies the process within which some feminist activists have made a conscious decision to become part of the so-called mainstream politics -- to reconfigure the work of breaking away from the feminist isolation and thus from the idea of feminism as an outsider to the mainstream politics. Within the process of absorption, official institutions incorporated some selected items of the feminist agenda, simultaneously mainstreaming the question of the labor market, and leaving aside the question of sexual orientation.

In addition, the NGOs activists treat the cooperation with the state was treat with suspicion. The anti-state attitude prevails amongst feminist activists, even as some of them "travel" between state and civil society engagements. Izabella Jaruga Nowacka became the first NGOs activist appointed for the Plenipotentiary of Equality between women and men, followed by Magda Środa. For the most part, however, Polish feminists have been wary of the state for number of reasons. First there was a memory of the failure of the centrally governed communist regime; then also the Solidarity origins and the tradition of the anti-state organizing. While for some activists, the alliance with the leftist parties seemed natural given, their albeit superficial commitment to social justice, for others the newly emerged left still held ties and resemblance of "communism" that they fought years ago. And finally many activists experienced the anti-women or

ambivalent state attitude toward women in recent times, particularly during the 1990s abortion debate and the 2000 European Union accession.

NGOs, private and public politics- strategy, integrity and the movement's internal accountability

For many of the women activists, the engagement with the state was more of the strategic choice than an ideological move. For instance, Agata in the interview with me argued:

When I hear „socialism” I'm all turned off; I just don't like socialism. I like welfare state and I like social policy but I have repulsion when it comes to socialism. It comes from my youth, I can control it and I'm trying to overcome it, but I was brought up by the opposition movement and in the axiom that the free market guarantees freedom of speech (...) So on one hand I repel socialism, on the other I know that socialism emancipated women. (r3)

Yet a few years earlier, she accepted the ministerial position in the left- wing government led by the members of the post-communist party. While many authors considering the question of feminist relations with the state emphasize the role of the non-governmental organizations in the process of cooptation and adjustment, the questions of motivation of those women is rarely addressed. Why do women activists, many times originating from the grassroots, local movements, have become the proponents of the institutionalization of the women's movement? What were the motifs of women's activists to get involved in the state and transnational discourses?

Many of the NGOs activists represent their choice to engage with the state and EU discourses more as a pragmatic choice; while their personal beliefs varied from the EU's policies, they often have made a strategic choice to work with both the state and the EU as they see this cooperation as advancing the position of women. For some of

those women, making such a choice necessitated establishing a kind of a “public” neo-liberal image of their organization, one that could meet the requirements of western donors and also fit into the government priorities. Personally, however, many of them remain devoted to their socialist roots and the grass-roots mobilizing traditions. Ewa, the human rights movement activist who represents the younger generation of “radical” feminists, describes her first encounter with the representative of the “professional” feminist NGO in the early 2000s:

When I was organizing the anarchist, anti-borders camp, we wanted to talk about the trafficking of women. I was then very much interested in the prostitution and the feminist’s debates on trafficking of women and violence against women. I came to have this very „sex positive” approach and I was against the censorship of pornography and so on... Anyways, we made a phone call to La Strada and ask if someone could come and talk about it. And we were expecting the institutionalized feminism that we would have to fight. But who came was this super cool women, a lesbian activist and a punk rocker, and she felt really good with us. This made me take an internship with the La Strada later on (r30)

Ewa argues that what was appealing in her work for La Strada was the fact that every woman there had a different view on prostitution, pornography, and immigration. While on the one hand this “serious”, “professional” regional network was bounded by certain institutional requirements and fund raising guidelines that limited radicalism, women who worked there were not really that institutionalized. The collective feminist identity of the organization was in fact very different from the feminist identities of its employees. Presented in such a light, institutionalization can be thus seen as a strategy with a twofold objective: to get funding as well as the possibility to act within the

discursively limited public sphere. In case of La Strada, the women's pragmatic usage of the legal discourse allowed them to make their arguments "readable" to lawyers, politicians or police and health care service workers. Using professional narrative allowed them to reach out to and be credible for the men who worked for the police or the national guards, which in fact can be seen as a strategy for broadening the feminist discourse. Although maintaining their radical roots, these women made informed decisions to utilize various discursive strategies, for instance, to create law, to engage in the process of its creation, to pursue the obeying of the law, to teach the institutions or to impact institutions, or even to become parts of institutions. In many ways, such consciousness of the strategies and choices make the cooperation of women of various backgrounds, from anarcho-feminism to party politicians, possible. There is thus a discrepancy between the choice of the strategies and tools and the way we think about the law and the personal politics and the point of view/ideology.

EU and the NGOs accountability crisis

Such strategic use of the EU discourses and the state institutions was crucial to the survival of many NGOs. At the same time, younger feminists and leaders of the regional women's groups raised important questions about the movement's integrity, internal accountability and connectivity with broader female audiences. The EU accession processes legitimized NGOs in the mainstream public sphere; it resulted in framing the NGOs as the representatives of the feminist movement, but also resulted in a growing distance between professional feminist NGOs and mass women's movement. Like in Latin America, this situation developed into the "mainstreamization" of the feminist discourse and the proliferation of the feminist actors who focused on goals and strategies

that in majority of cases represented the middle class, educated women. While acknowledging the ways in which the specialized feminist movement impacted the policy making, Alvarez argues that the process of institutionalization and professionalization of feminism resulted in the formation of the movement that was less inclusive and less internally democratic than the early feminist mobilizations. Moreover, the access to resources (e.g. language) and institutions that opened up for some women's organizations after Beijing became the site of power struggle, production of hierarchies within the movement, and thus finally a site of exclusion of some of the groups from the movement (Alvarez 1995).

In Poland, local, national, trans-regional, alter-globalists and trade union women's mobilizations have been pointing to the mishaps of the state-EU- feminist coalitions. Many of these critiques argue that the neoliberal focus of the NGOs agenda led to alienating the professional feminists from women outside of their social and economic class. Magda, a feminist NGOs activist, an anarcho- feminist and philosopher, proposes to see the repression of the left-wing feminist genealogies as responsible for the success of the „new governmentality” approach in Poland. Leaders of the trans-regional feminist coalitions such as Karat, Astra or WIDE have been articulating similar critiques, pointing to the tendencies to over-associating feminism with the western, liberal tradition. The director of one of them argued that

when feminism started, for many women activist it was about importing stuff from the West, United States. But I had a „gut“ feeling that it is not what it is about, that we were importing something but that there was always something here –tradition of women's emancipatory thinking (r17)

A number of feminist activists have been pointing to two kinds of disintegration of the feminist movement that comes along with the EU: the rise of the competitive model of feminism and the regional disintegration. One of the negative aspects of the cooptation of the feminist movement, pointed particularly by the Third World feminists, has been an almost exclusive focus of the organizations on the supranational level for lobbying and funding. Many authors argue that as a result of transnationalization of the feminist agenda, the global level became a major venue for organizations. The emergence of certain feminist NGOs as crucial actors within the conversation between international institutions and the nation state has marked the beginning of the professionalization of NGOs; it was also the beginning of their disintegration from the grassroots women's mobilizations, and the incorporation of some parts of the feminist discourse into the mainstream politics. Moreover, as a result of transnationalisation of the feminist agenda, the global level became a major venue for organizations. In Poland, too, the classic feminist slogan "think globally-act locally" has been, by some, inverted into the practice of "acting globally" and "thinking locally". Malgosia, who described herself as a radical opponent of the state alliances, argues:

I think that the EU funds disintegrated women's movement; they sliced it, because the money that comes in is devoted to the legislation, it's for workshops, cooperation with business which results in the organizations focusing on this local activities. And they don't have time, because to operate the EU project is very time consuming. They don't have time, they have no money to carry out the project on the unemployment that doesn't really translate into politics. And so they just keep going the workshops for women, they have their partners and they don't want to hear about feminism. The energy is wasted and

there is no way to do something other, broader. So that is why I think the EU funds is a big deal...(r30).

Similarly in the context of the eastern European enlargement, part of the regional coalition members' concern was that a new border of the EU would create a divide within the region; while the members of the EU would cherish their bond with Eastern Europe, the women east of the EU would be left behind. In her interview within the NSF project, Alina expressed her concerns regarding the division of the region:

this division has deepen dramatically (...) Now when we have an access to the EU funds they will be focusing mostly on the cooperation with western Europe. It will be really hard to include the organizations from outside the Union (....) Our friends from the former Soviet Union and Russia are pushing us, they say: you left us, more and more project focus on the European Union. And they want to cooperate with us. They still live in the system that they live in and h=they don't believe in statements and position paper. For them it is only paper, and it will be, event though we (the EU members) already see the difference (NWP9)

Within the EU enlargement process, regional coalitions and women's groups paid special attention to produce alliances and mobilize across fixed geopolitical divisions. They brought together women from outside the European Union, the Second and Third world (Astra and WIDE), and initiated a balanced dialogue between the First and Second world locations (NEWW). Many times they focused on particular issues and concerns, such as women's reproductive rights, the issues that certain, unexpected groups of women share transnationally. But they also felt the consequences of the state- feminist alliance.

Initially, the idealization of the "civil society", in the light of the disintegrations that were accompanying the EU accession, led to the exposure of its drawbacks: unequal

power relations, the lack of legitimization, civil society organization's questionable ties to the state as well as to foreign sponsors and private agencies. Ultimately, however, in Poland the process of fragmentation of women's movement, the unintentional bi-product of the EU enlargement, has in the long run benefited rather than hurt feminist activism. The post- Beijing and pro-EU professionalization of the NGOs have ultimately resulted in a greater diversification and fragmentation of the women's movement, which became a serious challenge to the mass movement paradigm of the feminist mobilization. Within that process, women's NGOS are the transmitters and venues of transformation as well as actors representing a certain stage of the transformation. While currently their positionality within the feminist movement is more and more ambivalent, women's NGOs have been a point of reference of modern Polish feminism's variety, ranging from professional albeit small radical to service organizations. In Poland, unlike in other locations, NGOs have never become the site of a mass women's mobilization; rather, they represent what is often called a "professional" feminism, characterized by more open and inclusive informal groups and coalitions based on loose membership and wide political agenda. Such groups seem to attract larger numbers and more diverse groups of women.

In addition, the clash of the "private" and "public" identities of the NGOs, activists the institutional limitations of the organizations and internal conflict within and between NGOs had intersected the significant venture of young women from the non-governmental realm. Younger women have become proponents of the broadening and informalization of the feminist movement, that I analyze in more detail in the later part of this chapter. This transformation has been in many respects a result of a paradigm shift in

women's movement, the shift from the mass feminist mobilization to the scattered and fragmented women's struggles that have marked the trajectory of Polish transformation after communism. Alina argues:

Facing the fact that we live at the certain level of the democratic development and the certain state politics that we deal with, NGOs are not able to maintain democratic structure; they incorporate the rules of power that are in stake in the state. Many times certain political culture which is present in the political life is transferred into the NGOs (...) You can not follow one set of rules when the others are more effective (r31)

Magda, a long time human rights activist and a regional leader from the North Poland, argues:

The groups that organize Manifa such as Lesbian Alliance are the future. I think there are many women, young women who think differently. And they will not be able to institutionalize. Maybe it was a mistake that we institutionalized the movement in a particular moment, because then the heavy burden was on us. But on the other hand it is important to have feminist headquarters and maybe once we have these head quarters they can do more...(r30).

The mainstreamization of the feminist agenda, although it mostly represented the façade government devotion to equal opportunities, has become a factor in the disintegration and in the emergence of unequal power relations within feminism. While the generation of older women is often perceived by their younger colleagues as not interested in issues important to them, and unwilling to “open up” the frozen NGO structure for the younger women, the generation 2000 is often accused of ignoring the feminist past and the previous feminist efforts. The professionalization has become the source of personal conflicts and the exclusion of a certain aspect of activism. While the professionalization

of the work of NGOS provided the job security for some feminist leaders, it also created a limitation for the development for younger women. Some leaders, often the founders of the NGOs are resistant to sending younger women to international conferences, promote them and include them in the work of NGOs at the leadership level. In addition while funds have been shrinking since the late 1990s, the less and less space have been left to give away to younger women. Beata has argued that although she very much supports the newcomers to her organization, she does not really want to give up her job as an NGO leader “Where would I go?,” she asked me. And she added:

There is no higher level where we (older feminists) can go work. Normally we would go to politics or government or international level but it is not happening in Poland (r12)

At the same time generational conflict alone is by no means enough to explain the dynamics governing the Polish feminist movement. First the shift toward the “street activism” has to be seen in a broader perspective of the “backlash” against a certain type of NGO activism that became a model in Poland during the accession period to the EU. The young women’s withdrawal from the NGOs did not eradicate the institutionalized feminism all together. It wasn’t younger women’s intention either. Although some younger women choose to act within an informal structures such as 8 March Agreement, Lesbian Agreement and Ulica Siostrzana, recognize the maintenance of the informal structure as fundamental, others, such establish their own feminist NGOs such Feminoteka, Mama Foundation or Autonomia Foundation. Finally, as I explore in details in the following chapter many young women maintain ties with “older” feminists within NGOs, they cooperate, and often times occupy double positionality as informal, street activists and NGOs leaders.

Chapter Three: On the verge of the new feminist wave- “Generation 2000”?

Sipping beer at LeMadame- a gay and feminist friendly club/ alternative theater in Warsaw, Iwona, a lawyer and young feminist activist, anticipates the future of Polish feminism:

I think we are on the verge of a new wave. Older feminists educated the chores of young feminist who are reproducing fiercely. And they are more and more ambitious and they want to do more, and they feel suffocated in what there is now. it is not enough for them, and they are not afraid to voice it. They don't want to be volunteers in women's organizations; they have their own consciousness and want to do their own things. And in the multiply ways. [lets take] lesbians for instance, there was no cooperation between lesbian and feminists movement before, and now I think it is growing, the fact that we have a Lesbian Alliance, it is the mark of the time (r32)

Indeed the emergence or reemergence of the informal groups and the “street” activism is one of the most important shifts within Polish feminism during the last decade. From the perspective of some women, institutional feminism became both too mainstream and “too tide” to accommodate their goals and aspirations. Both the mainstreaming of the feminist agenda and the narrowing of feminist issues to the areas important to the EU agenda, have resulted in young women's frustration with feminist activism. Iwona argues:

I think feminism became more and more present in public life. It is talked about, and it becomes mainstream. As it happens, it begins to have its own margins...(...) It (focuses) on the prevention of the discrimination at the labor market. It aims at equating the opportunities between genders. It states that we cannot afford certain things (radicalism) – that we should follow where the EU will lead us. This is a mainstream that everyone understands now. Even if someone is not a feminist, they are using this language. It becomes a slogan, and it is not as if it is only a feminists matter...(r32)

But while “watering down” of the agenda of feminism has been a successful strategy in relation to state and the EU, it also became a reason for the legitimacy crisis of NGOs among both younger women and broader audience of Polish women. Ewa, the librarian in

one of the biggest feminist NGOs, summarizes her disappointment with the way NGOs are practicing feminism:

The(ir) activities are going into practice, but the practice is specifically defined, which means that it is not about financing women's demonstration or counseling for bettered women, but more about workshops for women who want to become politicians...(r32)

Like many other younger feminists, she observes the growing gap between "professional" feminism's agenda and their initial goals of the 1990s grassroots women's movement:

There is a library (in my organization), which is a place that is going down, and which previously was functioning as an inspiration for women. I think there is a wrong assumption that to teach women at the workshop will be more effective than inspiring women to read books, because the book is an inspiration... My experience from the radical freedom movement is, that for people who don't have a formal education it is fruitful and inspiring to look to something more theoretical (r27).

As mobilizations that utilize the neo-liberal agenda have focused on challenging the hegemony of the state institutions, there is a growing movement of women, particularly those of younger age, who contest the hegemonies of the state without turning into the "professional feminists" who are often times far removed from the broader social context. Younger women are not afraid to take their voice some harsh critiques of the work of the previous generations. Ania, the director of a prominent feminist NGO, the street activist and the Green Party leader, now in her late 30s, argues:

The older generation represents the ghetto mentality (...) For them the priority is to be closed in their own circle. They are not interested in appealing to wider public. (...) And here I'm talking about the group of women who were establishing the first feminist initiatives. First off all, they competed about money, second, the problem was that feminism has not been then the grassroots movement (...) The earlier generation started

as a consciousness raising group, at a certain point it had been a grassroots initiative but then turned into an association and from that point on they realized that the western donors have been interested in creating a civic movement and civil society and feminism in Poland. When the first money arrived there had been a conflict and as a result the association, which had a dozens of women's members, turned into a foundation that hires 3 people. And the whole rest just hates feminism. So money and being attached to the jobs. It's being feminist as a job, treating it as any other occupation. (r23)

The current generational transformation in feminism in Poland is an instance of the processes described by Jalusic and Antic who argue that during the early 1990s, women's and feminist's organizations in Central Eastern Europe focused mostly on social issues and assistance for women, and to a lesser extent demanded a greater participation of women in politics. Since women were excluded from the new leadership and many of the social and economic benefits were weakened, they could hardly construct, at least in the beginning, anything apart from negative-sounding, defensive topics, such as defending the right to an abortion (Jalusic and Antic 2001). Issues such as sexual harassment, sexism in the media, the responsibilities of the state institutions, and the limits of privacy and motherhood, have been for a long time on the margins of NGOs' agenda. These problems are particularly important for women who became adults after the end of state socialism and who entered the social reality in which most of the social provisions granted by the socialist state had been already taken away.

This chapter focuses on the two instances of the younger women mobilizations. Women's Alliance puts together yearly street demonstration- Manifa's. Sisterhood Street, which I was a confounder and remain a member of, is an informal group, an organizer of the summer feminist camps, I argue the work of the Women's Alliance

represents an attempt to move away from institutional feminism towards the feminist coalition, in which the rules of participatory democracy go hand in hand with the new feminist strategies: emphasis on the role of language, street activism and engaging various groups of women in feminist activism. I see the work of the informal Sisterhood Street, as emerging as a result of the conflict within institutional feminism. Such groups focus on moving away from an educational model of feminism, and the inclusion of those groups of women from outside big cities, who have not been exposed to feminism either in the form of NGOs work or street action. This chapter follows the trajectory of both groups and argues that for the new wave of feminist activists, issues related to the conflict within feminism and the emotional content of the feminist work became crucial.

The post-socialist transformations, generational shifts cannot be seen solely in the context of this “new wave” of feminist activism. Age differences, while important, intersect with other axes of diversity within the feminist movement, such as, regional differences, ideological contentions between liberal and socialist feminists, the emergence of Catholic feminism, new forms of secular feminism, lesbian feminism, or revival of the cultural Jewish identities that are the subjects of later chapter of this dissertation. Together, these different streams form feature- fragmented and scattered mobilizations that focus on the recognition of diverse sources of women’s oppression (state, media, transnational corporations, Church) and the employment of various tools to fight them. For instance, the work of the Women’s Alliance, established as a reaction to the violation of the abortion law by the police, consists of the coalition of women's organizations, including members of alternative movements and gay and lesbian organizations. The Alliance’s work focuses on the organization of the yearly feminist

Manifa on March 8th. The coalition combines traditional activism (the representatives of the women's NGOs and women politicians can give speeches at the demonstration) and the elements of festival (performances and music are crucial part of demonstration) to engage the broader public with women's issues. Similarly, while the informal group, Ulica Siostrzana, founded by younger activists, has been organizing the yearly feminist camps, the inclusion of the women over 50 into the group has been one of its priorities.

The generational shifts are one of the transformations that mark a transition from the fixed feminist identity to the recognition of hybridity and intersectionality of women's subjectivities. While often keeping attachments to the institutionalized movement and utilizing the resources and space provided by the NGOs, these young women are looking for less structured forms of activism; ones that are at the same time less bounded by the troubled relations with the state, require less bureaucracy and structure, and focus more on reaching out to broader female audience.

8 March Women's Alliance: Taking back the streets

While being very straightforward in her critiques of the work of NGOs, Iwona still works in one of the feminist organizations that focus on monitoring the legal changes. She publishes her essays on a feminist portal, and as a lawyer, in many of her articles she argues in favor of state- friendly legislative solutions to women's issues, and pro-liberal governmental policies. On the other hand, together with Ewa and some other 100 young and not so young feminist activists, Iwona is a the part of the 8 March Women's Alliance, an informal coalition that has been organizing Manifa's and street action in Warsaw and other major cities for almost 8 years now. Iwona got involved in the work of the group after coming back from her NEWW fellowship in the US:

At OSKa's website, which I was checking out regularly I found information about a pre-Manifa meeting and I just went to it. At the meeting, with two other people, I became responsible for taking care of the legalization of Manifa in 2005 and for the next 3 months I have been intensively working on it. For these three months I met plenty of people, mostly young, who are gathered around the Women's Alliance and, later the Lesbian Alliance. And it has been a very intense and fruitful time for my feminism; in terms of feminism, sexual minorities and getting to know the whole feminist community. And it is still going on. I have a feeling that the Women's Alliance is still developing from the organization focusing only on organizing Manifa to the group active the whole year around. And it is a hard situation because the Alliance is very diverse and very different people are active in there (r32).

Established as a reaction to violation of the abortion law by the police, initially the Alliance focused solely on organizing March 8th street demonstration - Manifa. These women's marches, in which growing number of men have been participating over the years, are one of the most interesting phenomenon of the Polish public space during last few years. Initially, Manifa was a part of the National Woman's March, initiated by a Canadian women's organization. Similar marches took place in Paris, London and Prague.

The group that organized Manifa in Poland established spontaneously during the meeting of the representatives of the women's groups in reaction to "Lubliniec case". In February 2000 police had invaded the gynecologist clinic in the Warsaw suburbs and arrested a doctor and the doctor's patient, who just underwent an illegal abortion. While according to Polish law, woman cannot be charged for the illegal termination of

pregnancy, women's activists were outraged not only by the fact that the woman was arrested but also that she has been taken into the police station where she underwent a medical examination. The goal of the meeting that followed the "Lubliniec case" was to establish a reaction group that would be able to respond to such violations from various points of view- human rights, legal, and violence against women, as well as able to lobby the government to prevent such cases. The idea of Manifa emerged as a by-product of the meeting, as organizing the women's march was one of the ideas brought up during the gathering.

The first Manifa took place on March 8, 2000. The second and third were organized in 2001, and 2002. The main objective of the group is to focus, each year, on one particular issue related to gender equality (violence, equality in the labor market, reproductive rights, women's political participation). Manifa combines the traditional activism (the representatives of the women's NGOs and women politicians can give speeches at the demonstration) and the elements of festival (performances and music are crucial part of demonstration) to engage a broader public with women's issues. Over the years Manifa expanded, in 2008 and 2009 demonstrations have been organized in the number of Polish cities including Krakow, Lodz, Gdansk and Wroclaw.

Like in Latin America, in Poland social protests are not new in Poland (Kaplan 2004). Similarly to countries such as Chile and Argentina, in Poland during the time when the participation in the institutionalized politics of the authoritarian regimes was restricted or impossible, street activism (with strikes) became one of the few ways in which civic engagement could be exercised (Kaplan 2006). Street activism was the strongest during the "first" and the "second" Solidarity movement of the 1980s, and it was in a very

different manner carried out by the mass anti EU street demonstrations of the early 2000s. What is unique about Manifa is its focus on gender and the ability to attract large groups of women and men around quite radical social demands and feminist slogans. It not only proves wrong the popular notion of the dissolution of the of social mobilization after 1989- Manifa and Equality Marches are mass events on behalf of the minority groups in the regions, but Manifa also introduces new forms of social language that engages public spaces and combines traditional protest with art and performance. It manages to destabilize the tradition of the “negative” language of anger, violence, and frustration used widely by the anti- EU farmers’ protests in 2001-2004. Instead it proposes to and combines the seriousness of feminist demands with laughter, irony and joy. On the other hand, Manifa also challenges the “professional” language used by the feminist NGOs and introduces women’s issues to the public with “street language” that includes performances, dances and singing. Manifa thus represents an effort to broaden feminist discourse and expand feminist narratives beyond the “gender equality” discourse offered by the NGOs. At the same time its organizers are not afraid to utilize radical discourses and extreme forms of activism. The narrative of Manifa makes references to current events and often takes a radical stands on them. When in 2002, the Archbishop of Gdansk, called the Plenipotentiary of Women's Affairs, Izabella Jaruga, (who supported the right to abortion) a “feminist cement, that has to treated with acid”, at that year’s Manifa, women were holding transparents with the slogan “We are feminists cement” on it. Each year the demonstration is organized under carefully discussed and chosen slogans. For instance, in 2000, the main slogan of the demonstration was “I have enough- Polish Mother” (Mam tego dosc- Matka Polka) and “Democracy without women is half

democracy” (Demokracja bez kobiet to pol demokracji). In 2005, the Manifa’s participants marched under the name ‘Solidarity March’ and aimed at bringing various groups of women together under the slogan; “Let’s fight together, Be free and defend our Rights!”. At the same time each year, the organizers publish a magazine that includes the information about Manifa and some articles. For instance in 2001, the “Pipka Voice” magazine included the “interviews” feminists impersonating caricatures of “Mother Pole” and “Miss Pro-Family Policy”. Such choice of venues and style of communicating feminist agenda, expresses Manifa attempted the shift from high politics and academia to “street theory” that allowed for the combining references to current events, alternative forms of engaging the public space, and serious claims about issues that are important for Polish women.

Another key element of, Manifas, dance and performance became a key and creative tool of entering politics. Like in case of women’s street actions in Chile, explored by Temma Kaplan, younger women are not afraid to use the "public" space as a space for spectacle, take the streets in a way guerrilla theater does (Kaplan 2004). Performativity became the key aspect of Manifa, echoing the postmodernist claim that identity is a purely social construct and that identities are not given or fixed but rather produced and reproduced by dominant narratives and performed by individuals (Butler 1990). Younger feminists use performativity to claim and re-claim the urban public space by for instance dancing around the monuments of famous Poles (usually male) that are located along the route of the Manifa in Warsaw which started during the 2002 demonstration. The “younger” forms of the activism are however put in the context of the broader narrative of feminism in Poland. The 2001 Manifa mocked the communist

custom of giving women one flower on the International Women's Day. On the poster created for that year by Monika Zielinska and Teresa Oleszczuk, young woman is throwing away flowers while the phrase underneath stated, "I'm fed up with it!" (To mi sie przejadło). Another one represents several women holding flowers in their mouths with the slogan "Don't let yourself be gagged!" (Nie daj sobie zatkać ust byle czym!). Through dance, song, and paintings or posters, the organizers are claiming public space in order to draw public attention to women's concerns. By negotiating with other participants about how each message will be performed, women become active agents who claim their subjectivities. Collectively, they shape a social and political agenda in public space, even if only temporarily. Performers lay their own claim to the public space of the city, the space that had become increasingly gendered because male politicians, male farmers, and male workers, but rarely women use it for their own political purposes.²²



²² The ex
again in
joined by

Manifa 2006 “Feminism is contiguous”

Over the years, including groups of women previously neglected by feminism became another priority of Manifa. For instance, while the 2002 march was devoted to reproductive rights, the 2006 Manifa featured a “special” children’s section and was partially devoted to the rights of mothers of young children. Since 2005, the Women’s Alliance maintains close ties with Lesbian Agreement, the lesbian collective established in 2004. In 2005, these two groups united while organizing Manifa under the slogan “Together we are stronger”. At the same time, members of the Lesbian Agreement put a lot of effort in engaging women from workers’ organizations and unions to join the feminist march. Most recently, while it focuses on expressing support for various groups of working class women, such as nurses in 2006 and employees of TESCO (a supermarket chain), a supermarket chain, in 2008, the emphasis on Manifa’s rhetoric shifts from irony to social justice issues. The 2007 Manifa that for the first time was called “March of Women’s Solidarity” alluded to the “Solidarity” movement of the 1980 and emphasized the commonalities of women’s struggles across class, sexuality and party affiliations.

Starting as a group functioning outside of the official public discourse and ways of engaging in politics, Manifa became one of the biggest successes of the Polish women's movement during the last few years. Since 2002, five Manifas took place and the participation of women and men in marches increased annually from 400 to 15,000 in 2007. Manifa achieved what seemed to be unthinkable in Poland-it mobilized large

groups of women around fairly radical feminists' demands. Among older and younger feminists the question emerged about how such new and, often radical group could attract such a wide audience of women in Poland. This was a task that remained out of reach for most feminist NGOs? By going beyond the official and traditional ways of talking about women and politics, and by choosing alternative forms of protest and resistance, Manifa became attractive to young women, who often avoided political engagement. Dance, performance, singing and making fun, seemed a good way to mobilize young people, who, according to the research, are bored and uninterested in politics, which is often perceived as a domain of corruption. By giving them opportunity to speak their own language (which often has nothing to do with what we used to call "language") Manifa started a new form of political agency for young women.



Manifa 2005, Warsaw. “The Spring looks the best in the light of the burning abortion laws” (The slogan, and a doll are the reference to the Polish folk spring ritual, during which the doll representing the old (winter) is put on fire and thrown into a river.

For many women, it became easier to join the march on the street than to become a member of the feminist organization. Over the years, men, (gay-men and straight men), non-feminist women, mothers, and politicians have become participants in Manifa. The process of negotiation through which Women's Alliance brought together feminists with women and men from many different social contexts forced greater self-consciousness among women's groups and demanded different priorities and different constraints, and resulted in less rigid and exclusionary form of activism. While its organizers did not hide their feminist agenda, the slogans used at the demonstrations were wide enough to speak to many of women, also those who do not identify themselves as feminists. In this sense Manifa became an instance of the street activism that emerges and builds upon from the female, rather than feminist consciousness that Temma Kaplan described in her 1982 article as follows:

Frequently, groups of women speak out 'as women' about public issues, legitimating their activities by denying that they want to promote any overtly political goals ... they say they are only doing what they were raised to do as ‘good women’ (Kaplan 1982, 45-46)

One way in which Manifa differs from the street explored by Kaplan in her work is that the idea of a “good women” is no longer a guiding principle for women who organize and participate in Manifa. Surprisingly in case of Poland a usage of radical slogans have

coexisted with the inclusiveness of the demonstration. The choice of venue along with a combination of radicalism and inclusiveness, not to say populism, rooted Manifa in the Polish tradition of the street protest. Going beyond the official and traditional acts of resistance performed in public space (protests, demonstrations, and/or personal attacks on public figures), and by choosing alternative forms of expression, Manifa was able to attract people who chose to remain on the outskirts of the political involvement, allowing them to be, at the same time, participants and outside observers of the feminists struggle. By performing in public, making politics a spectacle, Manifa's organizers acknowledge what majority of women think about Polish mainstream politics; that it is dominated by men filled with empty slogans about "family values" and "special roles of women". Moreover such straightforward evaluation of the politics illuminated that for many women in Poland, feminist subjectivities are easier to sustain when they are lived in a public space that is perceived as more anonymous than a more visible membership in a particular organization. By including women, men, and children of different sexual orientation, age, or class, Manifa at the same time softened the external boundaries of feminism while it facilitated the development of new connections within the women's movement and other social movements.

As organized by young women, featuring fun activities, Manifa also became an attractive topic for the mainstream media. Since the first Manifa in 2000, media have been very much interested in the event. In 2000, Manifa was news in the biggest Polish public TV-TVP1. Since 2001, Manifa is advertised on most of the radio stations in Warsaw. Even though many of them try to ridicule it by using the traditional antifeminist language, it still makes Manifa present in the public discourse. Many newspapers are

interested in Manifa, too. It is announced in the local pages of the biggest daily newspapers in the country and then reported on the day after the event. The 2002 Manifa was followed by a big report on the condition of Polish feminism in the most popular Polish weekly newspaper (“Polityka”). Over the years, the engagement of the media in Manifa became problematic, both in terms of the general representation of the movement in the media and the particular case of the mainstreaming of the movement. For instance in 2007 and 2008, the prominent daily newspaper, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, has published a “*Gazeta Feministyczna*” (Feminist Daily), raising the question of who has access to the media and how feminism from a magazine cover represents the struggles of women in Poland (Gloria Steinem).

Finally, on March 8th, Women's Alliance brings together feminists from different social contexts it connects women across gender and intersecting identities, while not requiring the subscription to one particular tradition of feminism. The way the coalition works allows the Women's Alliance to reach out and engage women from outside feminist communities, and bridge the gap between generations, classes and ideologies, showing that feminist discourse can be open to many. Manifa thus signifies a wider process of democratization of the Polish women's movement. In that sense, Manifa crossed the borders of the feminist movement, which is often accused of being narrow and elitist, thus challenging the rigidity of these boundaries by making them flexible, porous, and inviting. Manifa has also taken up one of the critical challenges that feminists in Poland as well as in many other CEE countries face: the fear of open affiliations with and the acceptance of feminism. The diversity of the “Alliance” also works to the advantage of solving internal power struggles within the group. The loose membership,

lack of structure, and vaguely defined agenda, which although constantly debated is a staple of the group:

Although some of us complain about the lack of formal structure, it is in a sense the situation where we have a dictatorship of the lack of structures; everybody emphasizes the value of it. I think now there is a discourse strongly present not to exclude anyone. We are all very conscious about it, and the reason is the disappointment with the women's nongovernmental organizations in Poland. There are voices about the glass ceiling or the glass door of Polish feminism (...) I think it is related to the structure with the generational shifts, and to the lack of ideas for the future. I have a feeling that we stopped at a certain level - that what was good 10-15 years ago is no longer working...(r35) Simultaneously the voices that demand the institutionalization of the movement have been raised regularly. Some argue that [Women's] Alliance should transform into Associations, other propose the so called Swedish model which consist of rotating groups of women responsible for various issues in certain domains such as legal issues, finances, media contacts, networking, fundraising sect. So far, however, [Women's] Alliance remains the unstructured (r35)

At this point there are around 100 members of the Women's Alliance with an additional 20-30 women actively participating via the website. The website serves as the main platform of communication and decision making of the group. (Women's Alliance organizes the occasional meeting during the year. Meetings become more frequent at the beginning of the year as the preparation intensifies for the yearly Manifa. Women's Alliance is a pluralistic and diverse group of mostly young women, through which various ways of "doing feminism" and feminist work come together and compete. Women's Alliance is trying to create a model that would allow everybody the same right to an equal voice. Women's Alliance thus undertakes an action only if there is a

consensus. That means that much of the group's time is spent debating various options/choices. Thus groups like this are the most productive in the sense of the identity of the movement, since the time is spent on deliberation; on what it means to be a feminist and what is feminism in this context. While its membership remains loose, the structure unclear, and power relations are the constant subject of the debates, participation has grown from 100- to 3000 people over the years.

The unexpected success of Manifa raised the question of the effectiveness of the feminist movement in Poland. In the context of the US feminists have been struggling with the question of what it means for the feminist movement to be effective? Is there an ultimate test for its success? (Stagenborg 1995). Or rather do various forms of activism contribute to the various aspects of the effectiveness and thus have to be seen through the various definitions of success? Authors considering the rise and fall of the various types of organizations in the US argue that there are a number of factors that contribute to the feminist success; the acceptance of the feminist ideas by the broader public, the new advantages won for women- laws and policy outcomes (Gamson 1990), and more general transformation of the political culture within which women's issues are discussed (Stagenborg 1995). Successes might include getting movements' demands on the political agenda, getting new policies implemented, actually having the intended impact on the society, and transforming the political structure. On the other hand the legitimization; recognition and the acceptance of the movement or groups as a representative of certain oppressed groups of people such as women, gays, or people of color, can be seen as a success. The mobilization of a wide range of women and convincing many of them to agree with the feminist interpretation of the workings of

stereotypes, discrimination and their outcomes within patriarchal political culture is the ultimate success here. Changes in the political culture can include shifting of the social norms, behaviors, and ways of thinking among the public that extends beyond the movement. In such a sense, the broadening of the political discourse can be seen as a success in terms of feminism acting independently of the policy or political outcomes (Mueller 1987, Stagenborg 1990).

A number of feminist analyses challenge the possibility of the “fixed” identity of social movement and argue that the current fluid and diverse character of social mobilizations is characteristic particularly to feminist activism (Alexander and Mohanty 1999, Dahlerup 1987, Edwards 1994, Grewal and Kaplan 1994, Gusfield 1981, Hawkesworth 2006, Mueller 1995). Thus some feminist scholars propose to measure the success of the social movements through their ability to mobilize a mass public protest, introducing new concepts into the public and private vocabularies (for instance the language of media) and initiating the process of consciousness raising about certain social problems (Stagenborg 1996, Epstein 2002). Assessing the effectiveness and the success of social movements, particularly those that focus of education, culture, and re-signification of social meanings and representations, must include the evaluation of discourse changes and include direct and indirect impacts that they have on generations of people. Susan Stagenborg, for instance, argues that taking into account variety of forms of social mobilization and diverse character of the feminist action three types of outcomes can be identified: (1) political and policy outcomes, (2) mobilization outcomes and (3) cultural outcomes. Moving away from the model that evaluates the effectiveness of the feminist organization based upon its proximity to achieve the ultimate goal of

feminist activism, ending patriarchal culture, allow us to evaluate, and appreciate more contextualized feminist success in the more local scale (Stagenborg 1996, Epstein 2002). Moreover they allow to see the process of building feminist movement's sustainability as a success as well (Rupp and Taylor 1987).

In the context of the US radical, small organizations have often time be conceptualized more as contributors to the social movement' sustainability rather than affecting or influencing particular changes in policies (Butler 1990b). While they focused on creating new structures and new social environment in which women can consider their lives and mobilize for social change their actions have been seen more as a matter of the ideology creation then of gaining new advantages for women in public sphere. Susan Stagenborg argues that even though these groups do not have spectacular achievements in the area of policy and legal changes, they contribute to making feminism visible in politics and building up the social support for feminist cause. Social movement organizations, utilize this visibility and support when they make political claims in "mainstream" politics. So-called radical less institutionalized groups create new groundbreaking structural possibilities, they mobilize groups of women to push fo further political action and they are open for the ideological discussion that can attract broader social audiences (Stagenborg 1996). In Poland, the situation seems to be slightly more complicated as NGOs have never became SMO, and thus they have never been a site of the mass women's mobilization that could be the force pressing for the changes in law and policies. On the other hand so called radical groups that have been attracting larger audience of women, been though they also haven't been successful in achieving significant advancements in the mainstream politics. The effectiveness of both NGOs and

radical feminist groups has to be thus seen more in the context of intersecting efforts to maintain and develop diverse feminist mobilizations, one that can introduce and disseminate new ideas.

For the last years the question of power relationships within the Alliance and the emotional relationship between the members of the group has become the main obstacle in the group's work. While the older of the younger feminists (women in their early 40s) who have been recognized by the popular media as representatives of the feminist movement, have claimed the necessity to maintain the "positive" image of the movement in public. Younger women demanded the equal representation and power distribution within the group. The question of the underrepresentation of lesbian's and the treatment of lesbian concerns as the "other's" women problem became another point of conflict. Similar dynamics have been haunting the Sisterhood Street, the informal group that I have been a member of. The history of the group has been marked by inter and intergenerational as well as "ideological" conflicts and raised the question of the emotional baggage that comes with the feminist identity. In the next section I will analyze these questions about conflict and power using the case of the Sisterhoods Street.

Moving out through the balcony: From Information Center to Sisterhood Street-conflict within Polish feminism

In 2008, Barbara Limanowska, former director of OSKa, argued that in 2001, internal conflict in the organization could be seen as a symbolic generational shift in Polish feminism. The conflict that resulted "taking over" OSKa, was according to Limnowska, a result in the formation of the new feminist identities. Younger women, she argued, brought up by older feminist like her, felt the urge to mark their own feminist identity

(Limanowska 2008) and started to undermine the ideals and strategies used by their older leaders. By claiming their own feminist identities based on rejection of the heritage of the older generations, Limanowska seems to be suggesting, the younger feminisms emerged as based on dis-identification; the separation from their feminist “mothers”, a conflict. Indeed, in my research the talk of conflict kept coming back in various forms of institutional power struggles, intra- and intergenerational tensions, personal animosities, regional and intellectual contentions. As a researcher and often times a friend of my interviewees, it has been hard for me to position myself within the stories that I have been told. I was torn between the sympathy for the various parties involved in the conflict. Some events had also even more personal dimensions as I was several years ago a participant of them. Below I have decided to talk about the struggle that I have known the best- internal conflict within the NGO that I worked in and then an informal groups that I am a member of.

The rebellion started in 2000 on OSKa’s balcony, where we- 10 or so frustrated younger staff members used to hang out smoking cigarettes. Monika remembers:

There was a group of people who worked in OSKa, and during the conflict that we had with our director, we spent a lot of time at the balcony. And we decided to do something that would not be about our work or our jobs, but our about our willingness to do something. And that it will be pleasant for women. We later put in the declaration that we want feminism to be a positive and creative experience compared to what we were experiencing back then (as a NGOs employees) (r1)

While in 2000, the institutionalization of the women’s movement was in the full force, many women’s organizations in Poland enjoyed the advantage of the institutional grants,

thanks to the Ford Foundation, OSKa enjoyed momentary financial stability, which allowed the organization to grow institutionally and intellectually and develop a fully staffed office. We all loved working for OSKa, were full of idealism and enthusiasm, but also full of opinions about what was wrong with Polish feminist organizations. We gossiped about our older feminists colleagues, our bosses who we often perceived as corrupted by the “patriarchal model” of power. From our marginal positionality of interns, volunteers, and part time employees, we experienced the power struggles between NGO leaders, exclusion within the organization, ageism and power of informal hierarchies. We thought that older feminists and NGO leaders were not much different from the patriarchal Polish politicians in their conflicts over money, power and influence. We wanted to be part of feminism but we also wanted change.

When she moved to Warsaw from Kielce, Natalia, a literature undergrad took a creative writing course offered by the Warsaw University’s Gender Studies. This course she recalls, which provided the venue to read feminist literature and meet feminists from Warsaw, made her think about feminism and inspired her to volunteer at OSKa. She jokingly argues that, at the time, she was seen as only qualified to be a „xero manager”; the person responsible for copying the press clippings related to women, which was the position for which she was hired to do without pay. But Natalia, like all of us „fell in love with that place” and wanted to know more:

I met all the women who were related to feminism. I remember at the beginning I didn’t know anything and I was sitting at the meetings where everybody’s talk was like a code to me: NGO, PSF, EFKa etc. I secretly went online and educated myself, so not to be perceived as an idiot (r2).

Ola, a sociology alumna, was hired to manage the library project and feminist workshops. For her, like for many others, feminists were more about the community and she valued the emotional aspect of feminism equally to its political agenda. She argues:

I was fascinated with all that although now I think it wasn't because of the social or political reason, but because the great women were there and the atmosphere. And I was looking for a women's community for something together, and things are happening (r2)

As she graduated from the „xero manger” to the „web mistress” Natalia became OSKa's paid employee. When I arrived at the organization after graduating from Warsaw University in 2001, Natalia worked at OSKa for over two years. I just finished my sociology MA and was hired to “take care” of OSKa's English language library and the organization's database (OSKa had a biggest database containing information about women's groups active at the time). I got a salary after only two weeks of volunteering, which initially put me in the position of the suspect among those women who either had to work without money for longer or still did. Eventually however we became friends. The age, similarity of the experiences and needs were an important factor in all of coming together as friends and as OSKa's staff. Ola thinks that

we shared the experience, because we, the girls who worked there at some point were younger, at different points in our lives. And that led to the fact that we just became friends (r2)

But for her, like many of us working at OSKa, this experience was not what she expected. The ways in which feminism was “done” in our NGO, we thought led to the situation when the narrowly defined particular interests of some groups of women become more important than others. As we were working in the organization whose aim was to disseminate information to women all over the country, we felt disconnected from

who we called “the real women” – women from the outside of the feminist community. We believed that our experience of feminism is sheltered and insufficient, that what we studied in gender studies (mainly literary criticism, psychoanalysis, sociology, political science, and philosophy) and what we did as NGO employees was irrelevant to our own experience, and the experience of women that we knew from the “real life”- our mothers, sisters, girlfriends who were not feminists. The number of exclusions that some women personally experienced, while being part of the NGO, made them wonder about the validity of their work in the NGO. Natalia for instance felt that her experience as wife and potential mother was not part of feminism:

There was one girl in OSKa that had a child. She had a child and because of that she was a weirdo. I think from where I am now that her needs were not taken into account at all... and the “regular” relationships were excluded too. One hand I was going home, where I had pots, a bed, and a husband. On the other, I talked about pornography, about black lesbians and so on. It was fascinating to me, but at some point I wanted my life to be part of it and this wasn’t welcomed... (r2)

For Monika the silencing of lesbians became a problem:

And of course the lesbian issue emerged... there was a feeling that on the one hand the subject is not silenced but on the other hand, none of the issues of OSKa’s bulletin were devoted to lesbians, there was no meeting, no debate devoted to it (r1).

In addition, the working environment has not always been friendly. For Ola jobs at OSKa started to be disappointing and emotionally draining:

What was going on let me develop the approach in which work is work, and I’m not looking for the community there, even though I still like people who I work with (...) But I look for other stuff elsewhere (...) For me working in the feminist foundation doesn’t

mean you are a feminist. It is more about a broader engagement, intellectual. And this is how I understand the social movement, not as sitting in one organization, but action and going outside (r3).

The inability to make a connection between personal, emotional involvement, and the “job”, coincided with the overwhelming sense of an unequal power relationship within the organization and the “hidden” nature of the power hierarchies within feminism in general. One of the rules of the work that we were doing at OSKa was that it was anonymous, articles, notes, brochures and pamphlets that we have put together we signed with OSKa name. However at the end it was, we felt, our boss who took all the credit for the work, as she was representing the organization outside. The lack of the recognition of the staff’s names, started to bother some of us. The feeling of being underappreciated was simultaneous with the observation that the professionalization of feminism, which provided an opportunity to be paid for activist work, often times did not translate into financial security for all of us. We were underpaid. Finally, the apparent perks of working in the NGO, such as attending conferences and having the opportunity to network with women locally and trans-nationally seemed not to be available to us. Eventually these factors made some of the OSKa’s staff conflicted internally, while the conflict with the organization’s director developed. Natalia tries to get into the origins of the conflict:

I think in the conflict was about power. In feminism it is hard to distinguish the professional relations, structural, global etc. from personal relationships - friendship and sexual as well. But really I don’t know what was the starting point of the conflict. (...) I think it was about power; it was hard to share that power, when the staff of OSKa started to mature and become ready to get more responsible tasks. And under our own names... Because of course we were a good staff, but as people who worked for quite some time,

we didn't exist, we didn't have names,. Because everything was done for the „common goal”” but really it was done under the name of our boss who represented the foundation externally. (...) Then there was a question of money, of how we were treated, of what our duties and rights were. It was all very blurry. (...) And then there were personal issues; it was hard for the leaders to let go, to work with someone more then the younger fascinated in their experience (r2)

While the ties of friendship kept us inspired:

On the one hand there was stress, on the other we were going to the feminist summer school. And it was hard the first night, the second, and then it was awesome. We were finding this community with each other (r3)

Some of us started to play with the idea of a new type of feminist organization, one that would meet our expectations. Monika remembers:

We started to think then what the ideal organization would look like, how we want to act for women. And of course the elitist character of feminism appeared to be big problem... the fact that it was directed to a very narrow group of women. It didn't really address the issues of „real women”, mothers, wives etc. The whole feminists circle was directed towards the certain type of woman, from a very big city, aware and intellectual and the feminist activist on the other hand. And there were about 300 activists back there and it seems like the idea was to act with activists...(...) and we though about going out on the street and ask them what they think... you know certain authoritarian attitude of feminists was a problem too, you know, the idea that they know what feminism is and what is important for women, even without asking, and getting a response from women on the other side... and there was this attitude when someone said that they don't like some think about feminism (r1)

Discussions on the balcony led some of us to quitting our jobs. Monika actually got fired. We kept meeting for drinks and dinners and eventually two of us came up with the idea of an informal group called Sisterhood Street. Partially the idea of the Sisterhood Street emerged as a response to the façade change of the OSKa's director in 2001. Many of us thought that, once again, our voices in the organization had been silenced. The idea behind the Sisterhood Street, Ola argues, was to „stop dealing with the big political problems” and to „ask women how they live and what are their problems”. Our first project was a feminist camp.

FAIR- Feminist Action for Information and Recreation

Monika was 19 in 1995, when she went to the feminist camp in Slovenia. It was the first time; she recalls that she encountered Wen-Do a self defense technique for women and girls, fell in love with the woman and participated in the lesbian consciousness-raising group. She came back to Poland with the idea of recreating the Slovenian experience and organizing the similar camp in Poland. She moved to Warsaw for college and, bursting with energy, started to look for her feminist space. She attended the number of feminist workshops organized by the feminist NGO leaders, and later became a volunteer and consecutively an employee of the two major Polish feminist organizations: La Strada and OSKa. Monika argues that the fact that in 2002 she came back to the idea of feminist camp had something to do with the frustration with the way that feminism was done by the NGOs:

I think we had a feeling that the things we are doing in these organizations are of course very much needed and so on, but it really refers to a very narrow group of women, who are already feminists, and who are already convinced, who are from the big cities and

who don't have children. And I remember including children, it was a Slovenian idea but there were some people here who cared about it a lot... They new this has to be part of it.

(r1)

Monika recalls:

Technically the idea of the camp emerged after the Slovenian camp. (...) And then it was too much work to get it done. And then I left OSKa, but still there was a group of people who worked or freelanced for OSKa and during that conflict with the director we spent, as you remember a lot of time on the balcony. And on that balcony I feel like this idea emerged, to do something together, something that won't be an official „job task” but the result of the fact that we just want to do something together, something that would be nice for women. There is a sentence in the Ulica's declaration that we want feminism to be a positive experience... and creative... unlike what we experienced back then..(r1)

The targets were the women from small cities, from villages and particularly important for Ola- mothers:

When you have a small child it is hard to go for a vacation for financial or logistic reasons. The idea was that the mothers would come with children and the children would be taken care of while the mothers will take care of themselves. And we wanted them to tell us the topics that they are interested in, because our assumption was that these women know and there is no need to bring up „experts”, who will carry out workshops, but that these women already have something that they can share with other women, and build the self confidence... these worked out... let's say not exactly as we thought.... (r2)

Like in case of Manifa the idea behind the feminist camps was to broaden feminist discourse in Poland and to engage women who do not have access to institutionalized feminist knowledge and women oriented activism in their daily lives. We wanted to

attract women from the small towns, mothers, older women and teenage girls. We aim at bringing together those who had no access to feminists' ideas and those who are not interested in feminism to discuss feminism in general and to engage more broadly in women's issues. One of the important aspects of the feminist camp was to destabilize the professional, expert type of women's activism as experienced in OSKa. As the feminist camp has been organized around the idea of participation and sharing, we faced some of the dilemmas that have been raised by feminist authors who attempt to conceptualize the possibility of the feminists' "safe space" (Sasaki 2000). The camp was suppose to be a safe space of education and pleasure, in a remote location, without men (boys up to 12 years old were allowed in the camp), computers, and cell-phone reception in which different points of view and women's identities could meet and get involved in a dialogue²³.

We aimed at translating the idea of solidarity that emerged from the experience of the conflict within the NGOs' and the idea of feminism as friendship, community, and solidarity into the space of the camp (Reagon 1997).



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Feminist Camp 2005

In addition, we hope to destabilize “educational” model of feminism, challenge the idea objective knowledge of feminism. We wanted to promote the participatory feminist pedagogy model within which knowledge is co-produced by women and not being simply transmitted from professional feminist to “others”.

We believed that being engaged in a dialogue in which talking as well as listening take place, and in which all sites are equally advantaged, may cause the political action and social change (which FAIR was an example of in our case). During the camp women could participate in the traditional lecture type courses- there were classes on feminists theory, history of feminism, feminists and religion etc., more creative activities and workshops such as dancing, art, and physical activities- yoga, jogging, and trekking. Wen-Do, a self-defense course for women and girls is one of the most popular activities during the camps. We encourage our participants to prepare and conduct their own classes, workshops, training, or other educational activities during the camp (this includes women leading tai-chi class, aerobic class, art class, and feminist t-shirt production class). Women can also create and participate in consciousness-raising groups in which there are no leaders, no teachers. There are a variety of get-together events, in the consciousness raising mode and over the years the groups on sexuality, birth giving, motherhood, and

lesbianism have been initiated. Finally, all women are responsible for maintaining the camp's space; we all share daily activities cleaning, washing dishes, as well as organizing social events, sports, parties, and demonstrations.

The goal of the camp has been to provoke a transformation from silence to speaking out for women whose voices were not heard or did not matter in mainstream public sphere and in professional feminism circles (Sasaki 2002, hooks 1989, Lorde 1984). By providing the participants with the space to voice their opinions we were also creating the space in which we could exercise our own agency. At least initially, the camp provided us the sense of empowerment and ability to shape and voice our own identity as "feminists". Like in the case of Manifa, although we wanted to include the non-feminist groups of women, we were not willing to give up on the term "feminism" itself.²⁴ In our attachment to "feminism" we were similar to a "third wavers" described by the feminist literature in the US (Baumgartner, Richards 2002, Findlen 1995).

Best Friends Forever.... or until the road gets rocky? Managing the conflict in the feminist group

First, we were disillusioned with the idea of the possibility of a non-hierarchical model of feminist education. Even though directly engaging with the critique of the Second Wave feminists ideals we as a group followed the ideal of the sisterhood and it was really difficult for us to divorce from this ideal (Reagon 1998). The distinction between the organizers and participants of the camp prevailed; in the eyes of women who came to the

²⁴ Till this day, even though the camp is "feminist" by definition and from its name, many women who take part are not feminists. For some women, the possibility to take a free 2-weeks vacation with their children was the biggest appeal of the camp. Sometimes, especially older women come to comprehend their own "second hand" experience of feminism- to understand their daughters' feminism and often their lesbianism. The equal participation in the event, the experience of a women's-only space, for some women is eye opening. For others, it is a phase in making sense of their relationship with women's movement that is not always friendly or even empathetic.

camp we were not peers, they evaluate our professionalism and they had certain expectations from us. We started to wonder, together with many feminist scholars around the world, if the “safe feminist space” could indeed be productive at all (Reagon 1998, Sasaki 2002). As feminists, some of us came to the realization that safeness can embody the idea of a politics of consensus, which reproduces traditional, liberal, thinking about politics, which also covers differences. We wanted to discuss, under the seemingly agreed common will²⁵. Only when conflict appears and can be practiced within the particular structure of the class (dialogical) in which certain rules are presents (active listening and speaking as the main rules) can differences between participants come out and be discussed (Sasaki 2002, Mueller 1995).

Second, we could not manage the growing tension between ourselves as a group. As is often the case in other locations, examined by the feminists scholars, we could not challenge the power relationships between the participants and us partly because we were unaware and unable to challenge the friction and hostility that surfaced within our own group (Mueller, 1995, Alvarez, Escobar, Dagnino 1998). Conflict became an indispensable part of our struggle to make the camp work; we fought about little tasks such as who would take the garbage out, and the big ones- like who would make decisions about money and schedules. Conflict, we understood, is inherent to political

²⁵ To a certain extent, the production of the political culture happens through the process of conflict. Only the coalition, which according to some authors premises conflict can be a productive environment for learning and action (Reagon 1997). Further, as Reagan argues this attachment is related to the idea of the women’s space as the household, the private space, the kitchen. I am sure that while being in a feminists group, some of us examine and repeat the relations that we experiences in our own homes. We repeat our mother’s care and love which sometimes is connected to some kind of paternalism (or materialism), the inability to see in our “sisters” real persons, different from what we want them to be. But the question of the feminist “home” is even more complicated than that. It is obvious that in order for feminists’ spaces to be clear and real, differences and conflicts have to be recognized as a part of it. This idea was however criticized a number of times for the essentialism effects. Instead the idea of solidarity women different but solidarity with each other it is emotional thus it is not essentializing (Reagon 1996, Mohanty 2003)

activism, and as Fox-Keller and Hirsch argue, is also endemic to the political endeavors (Hirsch and Fox Keller, 1999:2). But we also started to wonder if the conflict was about to ruin our project and moreover our friendship. Was there a chance to save both or would we have to give up on one, together with our idea of the “sisterhood”? As Carol Mueller argues, those questions we faced – should we silence our differences, and go on with the bigger goal of keeping the camp going, or should we focus on our relationships and let the project fall apart, have been central for many NGOs as well small, “radical” groups in the US (Mueller 1995). Like many other feminist authors, Mueller argues that in many instances both external and internal conflict within feminism can be productive (Hirsch, Fox-Keller 1999). External conflict illuminate the necessity to consolidate against the common enemy - make the movement stronger and more diverse as in case of the ERA struggle in the US (Cott 1998, Mueller 1995) or the abortion struggle in Poland (see Chapter One and Four of this dissertation). Internally the conflict can be crucial element of the social movement formation, as it allows for building a broader understanding of social justice based on the transformation of political culture (Alvarez, Duneon, Escobar 1998). Political culture of feminism, emerges in its variety when sets of social actors shaped by, and embodying different cultural meanings and practices, particularly those theorized as marginal, oppositional, minority, residual, emergent, alternative, dissident and the like, come into conflict with each other and the dominant feminist narrative. Feminist contentions about race and class (Childers and Hooks 1999) First and Third World feminists (Mohanty 2003), between second and third wave feminism (Baumgartner and Richards 2000, Walker 2000) and feminist of equality and difference (Scott 1999) instantiate such workings of internal conflicts. Conflicts as in

case of First-Third World feminist struggle can lead to the emergence of the new identities, the production of the new theories and diversification of feminist strategies and new conceptualization of diverse women's experiences. They simultaneously enrich our understanding of the workings of the feminism as a social movement and challenge often misleading ideas of the united "we" (Snitow 1999).

Determined to follow the rules of participatory democracy and to treat the ideology as one of their major priorities, small, radical, and informal groups are more conflict prone. They are at the same time more willing to open up and engage in the ideological debates (Mueller 1995). Radical groups such as Women's Alliance and Ulica Siostrzana tend to handle the conflict through discussions even when they see their ideas of friendship and solidarity dissolving before their eyes. In the case of Ulica Siostrzana, we had to divorce ourselves from the belief that combining friendship and work was possible. We realized that our fights and struggles were harder since we had been emotionally attached not only to the feminist political agenda, but also to each other. We had to address the way in which emotions impacted our work and try to move on.

As many authors in other geopolitical locations have demonstrated in the case of feminist activism, emotions are crucial, although rarely discussed element of both individual and collective identity (Ahmed 2005, Chodorow 1999, Taylor 1995). Feminists are wary of talking about emotion as they fear that it only confirms stereotypical female behavior, following the reason-feeling dichotomy (Taylor 1995). But feminism is driven by the emotions; both negative and positive, towards the world and within the movement itself. What initially makes women become feminists is often their emotional response to the discriminatory reality – feelings of anger, frustration, and

depression drive our engagement in feminist activism (Taylor 1995). On the other hand, feelings of love friendship, freedom solidarity and responsibility play a crucial role in building feminist communities (Lorde 1984, Taylor 1995, Snitow 2007). Feminists' work is many times motivated by a deep sense of anger to gender inequality but also by feelings of pride, joy, friendship, and love of other women. Verta Taylor argues that all the feminist work has an emotional subtext, although this emotional aspect is not particular to feminists organizations. Bridging the gap between feminist practice and theory requires recognizing the role and centrality of feelings as well as ideas and strategic actions that frame women's resistance to male domination (Taylor 1995, 224). To recognize these emotional aspects of feminist movements is crucial to grasp the ways in which feminist movement and identity emerges. "Emotion culture of feminists organizations" development of which Taylor advocate aims at re-channeling of the feminist emotions and redefining expressions that are "appropriate" for women according to the slogan "personal is political". Women can be angry, emotional culture of feminism" aims at redefining the features traditionally prescribed for women and reevaluating emotions. Simultaneously promoting a model of organizing that is based on "sisterhood", friendship, emotions, love, and care for each other (Taylor 1995, Lorde 1984). While at Ulica Siostrzana we went through the evaluation of our emotions, the group ended up falling apart from its original membership. Some of us remained in re-structured formation, and choose to work with each other aiming at finding a fragile balance between friendship and work, fun and responsibility. The fact that Ulica is for most of us a secondary commitment and it is not a significant source of income for any of us seems to work two ways. On the one hand it allows to lower the tensions and

competition around the work of the group, on the other poses challenges related to effectivity and commitment to the work that is needed.

Similarly to other contexts in Poland, non-governmental organizations, bureaucratic and formalized organizations made them more stable organizationally and better able to bring about specific policy outcomes. The relationship between institutional and informal feminism, has been shaping very differently in Poland. First of all, NGOs are small, in the opinion of many, less open to wider female audiences, and experiencing more “hidden” conflict. In the case of NGOs, the “professional” structure provided some kind of the hierarchy and rules; on the other hand, the lack of stability within the organizations, financially and ideologically, made both the financial and generational tensions stronger. These organizations may not have had the capacity to deal with these kind of issues and thus the power struggled became one of the crucial problems of NGOs in Poland (it was a small environment and very competitive). The conflict is not foreign to “radical” informal groups; they, however, make addressing the conflict their priority. They engage in the debates about the structure and they work out the rules to deal with conflict. The conflict has a chance to surface and it is not suppressed under the claim of the unity of the movement. It seems like in Poland, coalitions and small radical groups, both because they learned their lesson at the NGOs and because they have become more open to the broader public, developed more mechanisms to deal with conflict (although that does not mean that they were more effective in solving actual conflicts). “Radical”, informal organizations require commitment and a lot of time. Because they are also smaller, informal groups require more interaction between members and need to talk more about issues and less about rules. They handle conflict through discussions and the

recollection of the individual experiences. They follow the rules of participatory democracy and take its ideology very seriously. They are less goal oriented but focus more on structure, thus they often fall apart without achieving any of their objectives. They are often based on consciousness-raising, and such methods do not allow any kind of procedures to deal with factionalism unique vulnerability, budgeted problems, and the harassment from the side of outside actors to develop. Small groups in general, engage more often in the ideological debates even though they are often more homogeneous than social movement organizations. Like Ulica Siostrzana and Women's Alliance these groups that are not small in case of Poland do not have a stable membership, which is good and bad - good because it allows for the conflicted parties to let go, and bad because it makes the organization of the task harder.

According to Mueller the capacity for generating complex rules has the potential for defusing internal conflict. In Poland these complex rules have been created by the informal groups rather than feminist NGOs. Feminist coalitions and informal groups have developed as institutional rules deal with marginalization, and exclusion (women of color, lesbians, committees, they also have a rules to generate race, class, and gender balance. Moreover, less structured groups such as Ulica Siostrzana and Women's Alliance appear to have a unique advantage in dealing with internal conflict. As they devoted more time to the discussion of their structures and the power relations that govern them, these groups tend to developed more democratic (sometimes perceived as less effective) rules considering bureaucracy and the succession of leadership rules for managing the differences. Thus the efforts put into the development of the institutional rules to deal with marginalization, and exclusion and power struggles pay off.

Are we “mothers” and “daughters”? Problems with conceptualizing generational shifts.

Although overwhelmingly refusing the possibility of formalizing the experience of Polish feminism in terms of the wave metaphor, a surprising majority of my interviewees have referred to the mother- daughter relationships in their narratives. Many NGO activists saw themselves as mothers of informal women’s mobilizations. They have talked about mentoring younger women and wonder why they are not willing to engage in establishing new feminist NGOs. In my interviews, talk about disappointment in the young generation went hand in hand with a general pessimism about the direction of the development of the feminist movement, particularly growing fragmentation and departure from the institutionalized feminism:

The progress has been stopped, even though it seemed like it is going to be hard to stop. (...) There are some common initiatives, campaigns, actions and it is very nice. But on the other hand, some initiatives, and coalitions that were important in the promotion of women, disappeared. When it comes to academic feminism there are women who are known and who write. But these are only individuals, people who come and go, who want to be engaged and then disappear to take care of their life and their career. So everything is very fluid. There is Women Alliance, which is initiating a lot of action, such as Manifa’s. But these are only actions and they will remain as such. And it would be great if it will be only one of the initiatives, but there are only a few of such groups, so one can say it is only one. And one can say that due to its fluidity and informality and lack focus its possibilities of progress are limited. What can they achieve unless they will change and get institutionalized? (r28)

In the eyes of the older feminists younger women's activism seems often trivial and immature. Some felt that the younger generation turned away from traditional feminist ideals. This turn they argued goes hand and hand with "forgetting" feminist past, not appreciating what previous generations have done, pretending that we have discovered it all on our own. Recent debate between Agnieszka Graff and Barbara Limanowska, is the most vivid example of how the generational argument progresses. While in her article Graff claimed that there was no feminism between 2000 and harshly criticized the work of the feminists NGOs, as focusing solely on mainstream "gender" issues, Limanowska reminded us about women's activism of the late 1980s and early 90s. She also rightly noted that without the work and resources created by the NGOs and provided to younger women, new forms of activism would never emerge. (Limanowska 2008). Cutting across such debates are trajectories of both older women, who like Ewa Dąbrowska Szulc, the leader of Pro-Femina, choose never to enter the world of institutionalized feminism. Moreover while the younger women are predominantly the organizers of Manifa, every year more and more older women attend the demonstration (see pictures in this dissertation). On the other hand there are younger women's whose trajectory doesn't fit into the "mother- daughter" model of feminist progression. One of them, Natalia, now in her early 30s and since early 1990s engaged in informal activism, has been complaining about those lines of division arguing:

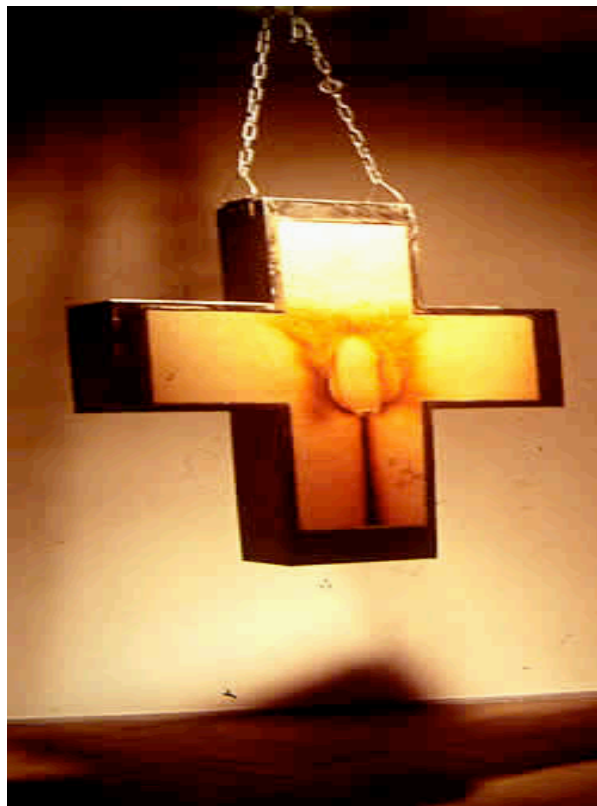
I personally have never felt like a "daughter" and I felt very disappointed that I was treated as one. As I told you earlier I was the one who did the first Manifas, even pre-Manifas, when nobody even dreamt about going out on the streets. I did it when I was young, I mean really young, so I was growing up with this movement, so I feel I'm solid, an integral part of this movement, and I'm at this stage of my life when I say that

shamelessly without falseI feel like I have something to say. And it happen often that even though I was there before even first Manifa, because of of my age I was treated certain way, because there was an age difference between me and the so called “mothers”, that I was always “a daughter”. It wasn’t a big deal for me, I didn’t think “fxxx it, I will blow off when someone will call me a daughter one more time. I wasn’t frustrated. I didn’t feel underappreciated. I did a lot and I knew well if I did something right and when I fxxxx it up. I didn’t need a commentator. But the moment when I really thought fxxx it, was when I became a biological mother myself. When I had a child, and decided that I am a mother, that I am “the mother” and I have a document to confirm that.

In many ways the generational divide is only a puzzle in the complex relations between various generations, forms of feminisms and institutional loyalties. The generational shifts cannot for instance be easily translated into the formal – informal divide within feminism. Contrary to popular opinion, there are new NGOs being established by both, younger and older women. Some examples of them are Feminoteka foundations, established in the 2005 and Autonomia Foundation, established in 2008. In their work, these new NGOs focus on both maintaining the cooperation with the supranational donors such as EU and facilitating the political, ideological, and instinctual debates within feminism. At the same time the new layers of feminists identities emerge. The debate over the Catholic-feminist identities and positionality of the lesbians and importance Jewish identity to feminism are two instance of the ways in which feminist debates on politics representation and location are conceptualized in Poland.

Part II. Politics of location and politics of representations.

Chapter Four: '*You have to give up on something!*' Catholicism, spirituality and the representations of difference in Polish feminist identity



Dorota Nieznalska "Pasja"

In me there is a place for one and another. I am built on contradictions, my identity is becoming as a result of these contradictions...(Tomaszewska, 2004:34)

She still holds “feminist views” and “does feminist work”, but Ola says she no longer is a feminist. And she adds:

If you’d ask me, I would say I am more Catholic now (r3)

In the spring of 2004 Ola was working for one of the biggest feminist NGOs in Warsaw for over 6 years. She was a co-founder of the informal group „Sisterhood Street“ and had been co-organizing feminist summer camps and trainings for women across the country. Her feminism began in Warsaw suburbs’ high school when she and her girlfriends started to meet for „Thursday dinners“; girls exclusive gatherings that “had nothing to do with feminism, but that men were not allowed there”. While working on the MA at the Institute For Applied Social Science at Warsaw University, Ola was amongst students who participated in the first in Poland seminar in gender studies. She recalls the first time she realized she is a feminist:

It was 1992, and there was no “gender studies” yet. We went for the history of social science retreat and the professor who was teaching it noticed, at one of the meals that my friend Ania and I don’t eat meat. He asked *And You Ladies; Are You feminists?* I mean here we were eating fried bananas and he figured if we don’t eat meat we must be feminists. And we looked at each other and said *Yes* and there was our first „yes“ (r3)

Early involvement in feminism was a mixture of excitement, discovering the female experience and work for the newly established feminists nongovernmental organizations:

I discovered the power of the menstruation, and I used to talk to everyone how wonderful it is that the creativity comes from there, if you don’t constrain the words, then women can be creative (...) And then one day I got the phone call from XX, which I didn’t even

know and she asked me if I would like to come and work in XX. I was there for few months and it was very important for me, and it built my feminism that there was a team and girls that I became friends with. And I didn't go towards the theory and so on but more towards that we are together and that we do something together (...) But then something changed when I got the job there and became an employee, these things became my duties... I just worked in the women's foundation, feminist foundation (r3)

Doubts about feminism coincided with the disappointment of working for the feminist NGO, Ola argues that the moment she got the job as a "feminist", her feelings of belonging were gone and she started looking for her "emotional stuff" elsewhere. She began to realize that feminism might "not to be a community of women that I was looking for". This change came along with the turn to Catholicism to which she was estranged since early teens:

At the beginning feminism gave me something (spiritual), but then it was repressed when I started to work in XX. And it turn out to be related to my Catholicism, I didn't want to do certain things, I refused to be part of them (...) (When) I got the enlightenment.... I realized that for a long time I was saying that I'm a feminist, but deep inside I was also a Catholic. At some point these thing started to fall apart, I was thorn between these two...(r3)

As she considered calling herself „more Catholic then feminist“ Ola was aware that being Catholic and feminist is not an option in Polish context. Gradually Catholicism became more and more important to her. She described the moment of the final conversion:

During the mass I was standing and thinking that maybe it is about Jesus after all, but it was impossible to even think that then. And then after the mass I approached one of the monks and said I'd come back to confess. And he said I was praying for you to say it. And that was it; right there, a miracle. It sounds obscure now but it was very concrete to

me. Imagine you are troubled and helpless and you even don't ask for it and you get an answer (...) I had more moments like that (...) I ask the question or not, but the answer was already there, someone finds something in me that I myself didn't even know I had (r3).

The turn to Catholicism inevitably clashed with her feminist identity. Ola realized that given her lifestyle- she worked for feminist NGOs and is in the relationship with a woman- claiming that she is a Catholic was a stretch. However facing an „either or“ dilemma she still didn't want to give up on the religion. In an attempt to negotiate contradictory identities Olatraveled through various stages to find her balance; from being “more feminist” to being “non feminist” and “more Catholic”. She also struggled to find alternative forms of spirituality that would help to make a fit for her conflicted self. In 2004 Ola became part of Krag, non-religious women's therapeutic and spiritual community.

For the last two years Ola progressively grew apart from her co-workers and boss in the feminist NGOs for which she worked. She reached the point when she felt like an outcast in her workplace. In 2007 when one of the projects she was involved in terminated, she was asked to quit. She felt that the “professional” reason for her dismissal was only an excuse; she suspects that she, as a Catholic just “didn't fit the picture”. Today Ola stays involved in the informal group activities and she still co-organizes feminist summer camps. She also regularly attends feminist and lesbian street actions, is in the long-term relationship with her girlfriend, although she struggles with calling herself a “lesbian”. She also remains within Catholic Church as a part of the neo-evangelization group although she didn't come out as a feminist or lesbian to her group members.

In the 2004 interview Agnieszka Graff, well-known feminist activist and intellectual argued that Polish feminism is currently at the point where, facing the departure of the young feminist it “has to meet with the different voice- the voice of the Catholic women, or Catholic feminists” (Graff, Smolenski, Wyborcza, 2004). Ola’s story, which represents dramatic, complex, multilayered and conflicted identity, confirms vividly the urgency to conceptualize the place of Catholicism within the grand narrative of Polish feminism. The presence Catholic feminists in feminism instantiate the impossibility of the “pure”, fixed, one-layered, predefined feminist identity, one that originates from polarized standpoints that operates within the dichotomies that counter rationality and spiritualism, individual and community. As they conform to the “different” kind of feminism, Catholic feminists disrupt and destabilize the fixed notion of the feminist identity in Poland, one that is always in the opposition to the Catholic Church. Their identities, based on fundamental contradictions and ambivalence represent what Diana Mayers calls “intersectional selves” that arise from the seemingly opposite systems of beliefs. (Mayers 2000). How can one live with the immiscible combination of being feminist and belonging to the traditional religion or spiritual community? Are feminism, Catholicism and further spiritualism incommensurable? Or are they negotiable and reconcilable?

Raising the question of the spirituality and religion in the context of Poland proves to be an uneasy task. First of all feminism as intellectual tradition and social movement has a long and troubled relation with the question of spirituality. Traditional religious faith as well as spiritualism in general, is often understood as standing against feminism. Feminist theories and practices have frequently placed themselves in opposition to male stream religion, and thus fail to address question of spirituality. In her 2000 book “Transforming

Feminist Practice” Leela Fernandes argues:

To raise the possibility of spiritualizing feminism is in many ways to propose an uneasy task because of a long history in which the invocation of God, divinity and the sacred have become associated with violence and oppressions. The history, in which numerous wars have been fought and forms of social oppressions justified “in the name of God” has led to secularized visions of many social movements, which struggle against various forms of inequality and oppressions. Certainly here is no better example of this than feminist or women movement’s that have seen time and time again the ways in which culture and religion have been used to justify the oppression of women. The secularization of feminism has in many ways been necessary (Fernandes, 2000, p.13)

As I have argued in the previous chapter, in many cases feminist identities in Poland emerged as a reaction to expansion of the religious fundamentalism into Polish public space. Over the last 15 years feminists have been facing Catholic radicalism that represents not only (or not at all) religiosity, but also certain vision of social life and political order. Many argue that current, dominant position of the Catholic Church in Polish public sphere represents complex symbolic and discursive construction that links Polish Catholicism nationalism, sexism and homophobia, which feminism has to oppose (Janion 2005, Keff- Uminska 2005). Polish feminism thus represents the case of the movement for which “its weakness became its strength”, the growing political power of the Catholic Church became an impulse for women’s movement to emerge.

One of the consequences of the rapid radicalization of public sphere and the domination of the Catholicism based vision of social life was the thorough polarization of the public debate and political positions and identities. As proponents of the dominant

conservative discourse attached to the certain kind of a “political Catholicism” represent themselves as standing for the values based in Catholic faith, feminist identity is often times framed as *per se* secular. Although recently many feminists acknowledge the necessity to engage in the debate with Catholicism, the question of the religion is most often framed in terms of the obstacles that feminism meets when trying to appeal to broader audience of women, majority of which are Catholic and the ways in which feminists can reform Catholicism; improve position of women within the theology and Church as an institution (Adamiak 1998).

But the question of Catholic feminism is also crucial from the perspective of the experience of the Catholic women who are already feminist. Thus far issues related to the presence and representation of Catholicism and broader religion and spirituality within feminist identity itself remain unaddressed. Representation of feminism as *secular* and contradictory to religion and spiritualism often results in the alienation of Catholic and non-secular women who already *are* feminists from the feminist community. The omission of the Catholicism in feminist movements and its conceptions of social justice causes despair and eventually the departure of those who refuse to abandon their beliefs. In this chapter I propose to take a closer look on the experience of Catholic feminists and non-secular women within Polish feminism. I argue that reducing the question of spirituality to the political debate over the feminism’s relation with Catholic Church results in the exclusion of experience of certain groups of women as invalid to the question of feminist identity. These processes of “purification” and constraining of the feminist identities at the same time frame the questions of difference and representation in the context of Polish feminism; the difference represented by Catholic women and its

exclusion envisions the workings of homogenizing hegemonies in the Polish feminist identities discourses. Traveling, hybrid or border selves of feminists Catholics and non-secular feminists in Poland, constitute the major challenge for the dominant “equality” discourse and call for the immediate engagement with the question of “difference”.

Finally, the fracture between the spirituality and secularism touches on yet another tension within Polish feminist identities namely that between secular neo-liberal and equality based feminist movement and the idea of the community based, social justice oriented, grassroots feminism. Leela Fernandes argues that the positionality of feminism as contradictory to spirituality, results in the deep spiritual crisis in feminist knowledge production and activism. On one hand, while feminism rightly been wary of religious institutions that have sought to control women’s bodies and sexualities, this wariness has allowed conservative religious and political organizations and movement to “colonize” the spirituality. On the other hand the disassociation between spirituality and social justice has alienated secular urban middle class feminist from majority of women whose understandings of their lives do not conform to easy distinction between the secular and sacred (Fernandes 2000). In Poland prevalence of the neo-liberal discourses that substantiate the symbolic belonging of the Polish feminist movement to the west, at the same time marks is distance from traditional, Catholic, Polish culture, which women are the most devoted participants. The distance between, middle class educated and secular feminist and religious women resemble the process of cultural alienation of spirituality based in grassroots women’s communities. To certain extend, I argue the spirituality versus secularism debate points to the necessity to recognize the complex and often contradictory nature of feminist identity; within which the distinctions between secular

and spiritual are not easy to make. “Decolonization” of the spirituality may have to start from centering the question of spirituality within the narrative of feminist identity in Poland.

Polish „theodemocracy“ and feminist movement: Jesus, The King of Poland

On December 12, 2007 the lead title of the major Polish daily read: “Poles don’t want Jesus to become the king of Poland”. The poll, according to which *only* 30% support the idea of the coronation of the Jesus Christ for the King of Poland, has been published as a response to the proposal of the legal act introduced by over 50 Parliamentarians earlier that year. “For Jesus to become the king of Poland can be supported by both historic and theological arguments” claimed one of the supporters of the new law (Gazeta Wyborcza, 21.12.2006). Opponents argued that such act would harm the constitutional division of the state and the Church. The idea was eventually dropped but what might seem like minor, insignificant and rather hideous political initiative has in fact been a part of greater trend that is to be noticed in the Polish public sphere since 1989. The progressive expansion Polish Catholic fundamentalism into social and political life has been calling into question the legitimacy of Polish democracy, raising the skepticism if the country is still secular, or rather has it become a religious state or as some call it “theodemocracy”(Hartman, 2007)?

While in the 1980s the Holly Mary button in Lech Walesa’s jacket has been the symbol of the resistance against communist regime, many people are now arguing that the Solidarity’s alliance with the Church is in fact responsible for the progressive invasion of the religious radicalism into the Polish political space (Sroda, Szumlewicz, Nowa Lewica, 2006, Keff-Uminska, 2006, image1). After the Solidarity’s victory in 1989

the members of the newly elected, free Parliament proudly hang the cross in the lower chamber of the Polish Parliament's as symbol of appreciation of the Catholic Church's contribution into overthrowing communist regime. Couple years later, in 1993 the religion classes have been introduced as a voluntary subject in elementary and high schools throughout the country. (In 2007 the status of "religion" classes has been changed it became one of the major subject, along with Polish, Math, History and Biology to be part of the Polish substitute of the SAT exams. The religion class grade is now also a part of the students' GPAs). In 2000 Poland, not yet a member proposed the amendment into the European Charter of Rights emphasizing Christian origins of the European Union. „It is a mission of Poland among the European countries to secure the preservation of the Christian heritage of our continent“ argued Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs. In 2004 authorities have recommended the first day of pope John Paul 2nd's visit to Poland as the day free of work. The alcohol sale has been banned for the whole 3 days of visit throughout the country. In 2006 the vice minister of education declared in the interview with major Polish daily that the evolution theory is a lie; he expressed his will to ban it from schools along with his own support for creationism. In 2007 the Parliament decided to move 40 million PLN (about 15million \$) from the Social Security Fund to finance the construction of the Holy Temple in Wilanow, Warsaw.

The radicalization of Polish Catholicism coincides with the raise of antifeminism in Polish public discourse on women and state politics. In 1997, with the strong support from the Catholic authorities and John Paul 2nd, Polish Tribunal of Justice accepted the Polish abortion law, one of the most restrictive in Europe as being consistent with the constitution. In 2002 the female artist Dorota Nieznalska has been accused of offending

the religious feelings of Catholics with her work „Passion“ (image on the cover). In 2003 she has been sentenced to community service work and prohibited leaving Poland for 3 years. Also in 2003 the Bishop of Poznan called Polish Minister of the Equal Opportunities of Women and Men “feminist cement”, which “should be treated with the toxic acid”. In 2004, right before Polish accession referendum to the European Union, the head of the Polish government called the “consultation” with the Catholic Church establishment regarding Church support of the pro-EU agenda. Right after the meeting, the prime minister, who represented the Coalition of the Left, the party with a long commitment to the pro-choice agenda, has announced that his government has no plans to change the existing abortion law, which, he claimed is a „positive compromise“ between the state and the Catholic Church. In 2006 during the first visit of the new pope Benedict XVI in Poland the advertisement of the women’s underwear, pads and tampons has been banned along with the ban of the alcohol consumption and sale.

On the other hand however women became one of the most devoted supporters of the religious radicalization. Older, rural, Catholic women constitute 70% of 3 million listeners of the first Catholic radio station „Radio Maryja“, founded in Torun. These “Women of Radio Maryja Family” made up a significant voting bloc in 2005 election and helped elect right-wing populist Kaczynski brothers for the Parliament and a President. It is many argue, thanks to Radio Maryja's help, that Lech Kaczynski is now Poland's president. His brother Jaroslaw, former Prime Minister regularly took a seat behind the microphone at the station, to voice his commitment to the Catholic Church. In their public speeches both Polish Prime Minister and President openly supported the change of the constitution for it represents the system of values that “is one and only one known,

present and followed in Poland... the one that is fully represented by the Catholic Church”(Kaczynski, 2007).

Homoerotic brotherhood, God, and Women; understanding Polish nationalism

But does the presence of Catholicism in Polish public life really represent the devotion to Catholic religion? According to the statistics only 50% of Poles go to the Church regularly. 60% support the changes in the abortion law and the re-introduction of the possibility of the abortion for the “social reasons”. While many argue that radicalization of Polish public sphere is a direct consequence of the Catholic doctrine, others point to a deeply secular character of Polish Catholic fundamentalism. In her book *The Uncanny of the Slavic Land*, Maria Janion explores the historic roots of Polish national identity and proposes to see the Catholic Church a guardian of the, in fact very secular symbolic structure of power that ties together romantic nationalism, the idea of patriotic brotherhood of martyrs and the representation of woman as a dead body (Janion 2006, 276). Janion suggests looking at the Polish nationalism as based on the symbolic male bondage; one that is at the same time homoerotic and brotherly. Polish nationalistic narrative puts a lot of effort to clearly separate “the legal, and desirable male communities- patriotic and nation building” from suspicious, rejected and repressed homosexual relations, which Janion argues makes it a case of what Eve Sedgwick calls community based the “male homosocial desire” (Janion, 2006, 270). The centrality of male relationship that has been a major theme of the narrative of Polish national identity since the 16th century myth of the Polish Nobel democracy, came into full realization within the partition period’s idea of the “men in combat” and later became the fundament

of Solidarity's ethos. Within this symbolic order, the one single function of female figure is to secure and legitimize men's power and homoerotic bondage (Janion 2006).

First of all the male community needs a symbolic, asexual family figure; the brothers have to have a Mother. As in many other nationalistic cultures in Polish case the mother figure is represented by Mother Pole, the idea of Motherland and by the alleged patron of the Polish nation Holly Mother Mary, often referred to as a Queen of Poland. Mother figure is not a threat to the male community. To the opposite it secures reproduction of the nation, and the idea of brotherhood indispensable to preserve male's homosocial community. Reproductive aspect of Mother figure is also crucial as it represents the rebirth of the nation, and at the same time elimination of the two non-reproductive discourses on sexuality: female sexuality and male homosexuality. Nationalistic rhetoric however strictly limits its focus on family asexual aspects of reproduction, as it puts Mother and the son in the center of it. Mother, as opposite to the wife allows deploying the process of reproduction from the aspect of heterosexual and female sexual desire (Janion, 2006, 278). Following the authors of *Nationalisms and Sexualities* Janion argues that many nationalist cultures with the homosocial dominant employ particular relationship with the figure of woman as a mother to hide the homoerotic undertones of the male bond.

Symbolic passivity of the female figure is represented in yet another transfiguration of women as dead bodies. Particularly among the nationalisms represented by nations that at some point suffered from the lack of sovereignty, women's death is a symbol of the nation's rebirth and is crucial to the national recovery doctrine. Nationalistic rhetoric epitomizes women both as saviors of the nation and the indispensable sacrifice of the

national salvation. In Polish nationalism the centrality of the female dead body figure has been accompanied by the certain version of the Polish Catholic exceptionalism created in the 19th century by most influential Polish romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz. Within the romantic doctrine Poland devoid of its sovereignty and represented by dead woman's body, will rise and like Jesus Christ and lead all the enslaved nations into their freedom. Over the years the two major romantic transfigurations of nation as enslaved and humiliated Mother Pole/ Polonia and as the Messiah of the nations have shaped the political and national discourse in Poland. One aspect of a romantic vision of Polish nationalism, which is still very much alive among Polish political elites, is that religion is no longer separate from politics. While politics causes take over the religion and manipulate it, religion becomes secondary to the political cause. The processes of secularization of the religion result in the elimination of the spiritual experience from the experience of religion. Secularization of the religious symbolism leads to emergence of the "political religion", "political Catholicism" (Milosz 1995, Janion 2006).

Over the years feminists in Poland have argued that in the process the transformation from communism to democracy the restitution of the national doctrine based on male brotherhood became a major political task of radical political elites (Penn, 2005, Graff 1999). As we have seen in the last chapter the reaffirmation of the centrality of the men's bondage required elimination of women from the political life, restraining their uncontrolled presence in the various spheres of social life. Introduced in 1997 a restrictive abortion law was by no means central symbolic act of the "purification" on the nation, reaffirmation of the traditional power structure and elimination of the non-reproductive sexual discourses. It became the tool to control women's sexualities and

secure homoerotic male power structure. Catholic Church once again became a guard of the political status quo and the beneficient of it. Such positionality of the Church prevailed in Poland for the last 20 years and Polish recent admission to the EU was yet another example of deeply political character of the Catholic Church in Polish politics²⁶.

The revival of the “pure” nationalist identities became an impulse for the production of the “pure” feminist identities. The turn into conservatism that took place during the transformation period played a crucial role in the emergence of the clear-cut feminists political identities and dramatic polarization of feminism and Catholicism. Julia, a young feminist argues:

What, I think is a symbol of Polish feminism is that the first thing that started to be discussed was abortion; it became the most important issue in the world. And this discussion has a background of the ties between the opposition and the Catholic Church. Opposition pulled the Church out of the private sphere it gave it the range that we have to struggle with now. The way that people think about Catholic Church in Poland, its position, the way that every political decision has to be date with them especially when you look at how for instance the left wing politicians take advices form the bishop or something (r19).

An emergence of the feminist identity intersected with the recent renewal of Catholic-nationalistic-homoerotic power structure. Judyta, the mother of two, the founder of the first in Poland art-feminist NGO and an organizer of the Equality Marches in Poznan argues:

²⁶ During her lecture at the seminar “Gender in Transition” at the NYU on Novemebr 16th, 2006 Wanda Nowicka argued that Catholic Church authorities while supporting anti-EU tendencies in some groups of Poland society, have been actively lobbying for the Poland accession at the supranational level. According to Nowicka, for the Catholic Church, to maintain the “Catholic majority” in Poland and to advocate Polish EU membership on the other was logical for purely political reason. As one of the biggest countries in the Union, Catholic Poland’s would be a representation of Catholic Church and Vaticans interests in the EU.

Obviously many women are suspicious towards feminism because of Catholicism and conservatism. It plays the major role in Poland. Even though there is a separation of the state and church in constitution; in theory 95% of Polish population is Catholic, still in practice also many people follow their rules. It is more about mentality though; I see it in my kids' school where I'm the only one who let them not to go to the religion classes.

And feminism is of course in the great opposition to that (r33).

Certain form of identity politics, that originated from the political struggle against domination of the Catholic Church required purity, homogeneity and demarcating a clear borderline between „us“ and „them“. Seen as representing the enemy and conforming to the rival system of values and life styles many feminists reject the possibility of Catholic feminism as an oxymoron. Moreover the attempt to reconcile feminists and Catholicism many see as constituting a threat to „our“ feminism. But feminist identity formation process both at the individual and collective level, for various reasons cannot be seen as emerging in the social vacuum, as being disattached from the context of the transformation into the “political religiosity”. As feminist identities had been formed as a reaction and in the dialogue with the broader context of the limitations put on women's sexualities and political rights, their emergence is dialectically engaged in the Catholic discourse in Poland. The role of the Catholicism in the formation of feminist identities is even broader as many feminists at certain stages of their lives have been Catholic. Finally for some feminists Catholicism is still important as a part of their identity.

What is then „our“ feminism, as opposed to „their“ Catholic feminism? To what extend currently dominant discourses of feminist identity are the response to “political religion” of the Polish state? How the process of the secularization of the religion impacts feminist practice and feminist approach to spirituality? And how the debate on the

representation/ presence of the Catholic women within feminism, envisions some of particularities of the representation/difference debate in the context of Poland? To answer these questions one needs to explore the ways in which both secular and religious women frame the possibility of the Catholic feminism.

“You have to give up on something”: Confronting the difference.

In the recent newspaper interview one of the leading Polish intellectual, Agnieszka Graff, who identifies herself as a “liberal, second wave” feminist anticipated the reconciliation between feminists and Catholic women:

I hope that the Catholic feminists will appear in Poland, and they will create something like the US Catholics for the Free Choice movement. They will go beyond the Polish style religiosity, where theology is for priests, where everybody goes to the church every Sunday and when the “misfortune” (vide unwanted pregnancy MG.) happens the money for the “procedure” will be found (Smolenski, Graff, 2005, GW 208, p. 20)

Later on in the same interview Graff describes her conservative, Catholic friends. She argues that even though she does not share their experience, she doesn’t think it is false. She acknowledges the fact that their worlds are constructed differently.

Often times they are people with the deeply thought out perspective on life, in which continuity, security, stability and family –this is the language they articulate it – are more important the freedom. I’m interested in women, I understand their system of values, but I don’t share it. I think this tradition is directed deeply anti women (p.20)

While not discarding the possibility of Catholic feminism, Graff associates feminism with individuality and freedom, and religiosity with being subordinated to the community, lack of freedom, independence and ability to choose as she argues.

One of my friends, very religious girl told me once that freedom is overrated. She values the community more than being autonomous individual. She simply wants someone to tell her, how she should live. It is a primary human longing- to be free from choice (Graff 2005, 20)

In many ways Graff's perspective is representative to what vast majority of feminists and non-feminists think about the possibility of Catholic feminism. Many view such identity as problematic as they point to the exclusionary aspects of belonging to the religious faith; denying women's voice, submerging the experience of women, excluding women from the religious leadership position. Religious communities are however rarely safe spaces for the feminist critiques. As in many US works the possibility of Catholic feminism is merely considered as an idea of women actively contesting the Church from within; pursuing changes in the religious dogmas, and women's access to leadership positions within the Church (Katzenstein 1998, Adamiak 1996). Catholicism-feminism reconciliation is however mostly framed as one-way ordeal, one that requires changes on a Catholicism part of Catholic feminist identity and assuming the unchangeable character of feminist part of the identity. As faith requires unconditional devotion to metaphysical and the abandonment of the rationality, which is considered indispensable for exercising one's freedom of choice, many feminists perceive their Catholic fellows as passive victims of religious practices. Their commitments and beliefs locate Catholic women at the opposition to liberalism and individualism, they thus cannot be recognized as feminists by feminists devoted those values. Likewise due to their loyalty to the religion that is perceived as "anti-women", Catholic women are seen as devoid of personal freedom and ability to choose. In the most extreme cases, Catholic feminist who not support women's right to abortion are denied the name "feminists" itself.

Such framing often puts Catholic feminists in the troubled position of “epistemic dissonance”, as they have to choose one or the other from the identities that they consider integral to their selves. Facing “either-or” situation these women often feel rejected by feminism; the ideology, identity and discourse that has been „already pre-defined for them“. Moreover they perceive prominent liberal feminists claim to represent Catholic feminists as “others”, as inconsistent from the point of view of the feminist ideals. The complex and elaborate analysis of the intersection of feminist and catholic identity in Poland one can find in the unpublished doctoral thesis written by Joanna Tomaszewska (Tomaszewska, 2004)²⁷ One of Tomaszewska’s respondents describes her experience of being “othered” by her colleagues in the feminist classroom:

Some women I could talk to and became friends with. But some have been nervous about me and said I have to be a hypocrite saying that I am Catholic and feminist, or rather claiming that I am. And others added *you have to give up on something*. I was considered feminist, so I didn’t question it and I didn’t oppose. I got to know the “truth” about myself when I went to the lecture and right afterwards I read an article. It turned out I take over the term and I claim the right to the name that I don’t deserve. And that it is pathetic and ridiculous of me because the Catholic cannot be feminist. It was with me for a week (...) I talked to my friends about it. I couldn’t figure it out; one feminist that is calling for women to speak with their own voice is talking for me, the other who encourages me to *look at my own experience* now is negating it, and she is recognizing her own experience as crucial... for me. My right to self-definition and my experience, were at the same time, recognized, and denied. So here we have a canon, who can and who cannot be a feminist, and even the rules of controlling the accuracy (...). I just accepted it. I don’t want to take over anybody’s terms, so I just accept that women are supposed to talk in their own voice, only if they are not Catholics. Catholics don’t understand this, but they would if they wouldn’t be Catholic. Feminists will accept them willingly, if they stop being Catholic; they should convert to

²⁷ (Miedzy feminizmem a katolicyzmem. Antynomie tozsamosci - 16 lutego 2005)

atheism, Buddhism, or Protestantism. But I have a lot of friends, feminists. They know who I am and they deal with it. I also know now that I am queer. But I'm tolerated I can come back to the class. Before I come, I will say: I'm sorry, I am a Catholic, but I know there was not *Catholics denied* sign at the door, so I came it. But I don't take over anything- I never say I am a feminist. I swear. I don't take over anything (Tomaszewska, 2004)

After conducting 26 interviews with feminist identifying themselves as Catholics between years 2002-2003 Tomaszewska provides a systematic analysis of various strategies of coping with such multilayered, internally split identity of Catholic women in Poland²⁸. First, most popular and mainstream strategy is represented by women who reject Catholicism, as they decided that to reconcile it with feminism is impossible. In various phases of their life these women have recognized that one can only be either or. Many cases in this group are represented by those women who grew up in Catholic tradition; Catholicism has been a part of their feminist genealogies, either as a catholic school experience, Catholic Intelligentsia Club, where some of the feminist first met their future comrades, or as an experience of the Catholic activism that has later evolved into feminist activism. As their parents and community have imposed it on them unwillingly, Catholicism is easy for these women to discard. Many of them abandoned the religion in their teens, often before they became feminists (Tomaszewska, 2004).

Women who attempt to balance both identifications represent two other approaches. First group are feminist- Catholics, women for whom the Catholic identity is fundamental and primary. They attempt to incorporate into their lives feminist ideas that do not coincide with religious beliefs. Those Catholic women mostly focus on re-reading the

²⁸ The starting point of Tomaszewska's dissertation is a feminist-Catholic self-identification; she used the snowball methodology and personal contacts to identify those women active in feminist movement who identify themselves as Catholic. Both definition of Catholicism and feminism used were very wide, Tomaszewska focused on the internal identification of women and thus her sample included for instance women who identify as Catholic since they have been baptized.

Bible from women's perspective and argue that for one who is truly Catholic it is impossible not to be a feminist. As they believe that feminism lies in the center of the Catholic religion that sees all people, women and men as equality in the face of God, they subscribe to the certain version of "equality feminism" (Adamiak 1996)²⁹. Such feminism centers solidarity between women, positive values of womanhood and fighting against women's discrimination. The common for those women, is their position on abortion most of the do not conform to the feminist pro-choice agenda. Their stand on abortion constitutes the central tension between them and the rest of feminist community and makes the formation of the broader political coalition, unattainable. On one hand feminist leaders whose struggles and identities emerged as a counteraction to the restrictive abortion law, deny Catholic women the right to call themselves feminists. On the other, Catholics refuse to participate in the coalition that claims the right to choose to be its major focus (Tomaszewska 2004).

The last group of women represents Catholic- feminists. For these women feminist identity is central and they aim at adjusting their religious beliefs in order to fit into their feminism. Some of women who represent this kind of catholic-feminist identity advocate the right to abortion. Many of them however experience „epistemic dissonance”; an inability to distinguish which identification is central for them. They describe their experience as conflicted and contradictory to the point of adopting the strategy of „an internal switch“; once they go to the church they feel Catholic, once they go to feminist meeting they are feminists. Although for many of them to reconcile the seemingly oppositional selves at the personal level is not always impossible in both Catholic and

²⁹ As they often work on the outskirts or outside the Catholic Church itself these women, most often do not share the idea of "New Feminism" created by John Paul 2nd and promoted by CC (Elzbieta Adamiak as an example, her book and that this is not "new feminism").

feminist communities, their “difference” is unacceptable.

Identity, difference and hybridity. Centering Catholic feminists.

It took Jowanka almost 20 years to realize that the conflict between feminism and Catholicism that she was faced might in fact be false altogether. For her to be spiritual does not necessarily mean to be anti-feminist. She believes that it is possible to actually practice feminism without abandoning her beliefs. Thirty something social worker, children educator and academic who lives in Gdansk, Jowanka is no exception within the feminist community when she associates her childhood with Catholicism. As many of her feminist friends and most Poles, she was “born into” religious family. As a child Jowanka wanted to be a priest, she therefore became one of the „white girls”, which together with ministers provided priest during the mass. She quickly realized that boys get better jobs as girls serve more as a decoration of the altar. Jowanka however somehow fought herself into playing Jesus in the Christmas church fair. These early experiences left her with mixed feelings about gender and religion and become an impulse for the first feminist reflection:

I had a general sense that I was out of place as a girl, so on one hand I internalized that girls shouldn't go close to the altar, but on the other I was pissed off that I cannot do what I wanted (r21)

Unlike many of her feminist friends, Jowanka didn't grow out of Catholicism in her teens. In high school she went to church everyday. She recalls that her Catholic devotion was a subject of ridicule, as it didn't fit into Polish Catholicism that she describes as „going to church once a week, listening to the priest and not thinking too much“.

Disappointed with the Church, frustrated with traditional Polish religiosity, Jowanka abandoned Catholicism. She entered academia and began graduate studies in sociology

with the focus on gender studies. The research for her doctoral dissertation however led her to encounter Catholicism once again. Jowanka jokes around that for her the answer to the personal, existential trouble was turning it into an academic inquiry, part of figuring out her experience was to channel it into intellectual work. Analyzing exclusions and rejections that Catholic feminists experienced in both, Catholic and feminist communities and the ways they dealt with their complex identity made her wonder about the choices and possibilities of reconciling the two. Doing the research she discovered that for her, as for many of her respondents one important aspect of Catholicism was spiritual experience that feminism failed to provide her with. She understood that for her these two are not exclusionary, to the opposite they built upon each other, are indispensable layers of herself, and she doesn't want to give up on any:

I started to meet these women (who were Catholic-feminists) and these meetings were incredible, they made me stop thinking in terms of „either or“ (r21)

Jowanka recognizes however that Polish feminist community is not yet at the point of accepting various possibilities of being feminist as many feminists aspire to the ideal of the “pure” identity:

(F)eminism is all the same, that one path is right, and if you don't do what I do you are not a feminist, if you don't do things the way I do them, you are not a *real* feminist. You are bad feminist. It is as if there was a fight, either the rituals or the activism you know... political. (r21)

Even though they do not conform to the “right” way of being a feminist, Catholic feminists who are deeply devoted to the idea of the gender social justice, constitute the constant challenge to the fixed, secular feminist identity. As hybrid, traveling and ever changing selves they symbolize the creative potential that one can find facing tension

between oppositional systems of value. These unstable identities draw our attention to the fluid and open character of the self, at the same time reminding us that feminist identities never emerges in the social vacuum but are rooted in diverse, often conflicted discourses and histories. Continually troubled Catholic feminist identities can thus be recognized as not only representing the “difference” that adds up to feminist identity by disrupting and destabilizing the “safe” image of the secular feminism. By engaging in complex dialectic relation of feminism and spirituality, which in Polish context translates into both; the relation between feminism and Catholicism and feminism and new-spirituality movements, they also point to particularities of the Polish “identity” – “difference” debate.

As Edward Said reminds us in “Traveling Theory”, theories are historically produced, travel throughout time and space, and change significantly in the process of particularizations (Said 1979). Feminist conceptualizations of “difference” vary greatly different geopolitical locations as they reflect the specificities of the certain geopolitical and historic contexts. Most often however the question of difference has been framed as both representing of the differences between women and men and simultaneously as a question of differences between women that became one of the paradigmatic discourses within the transnational debates between First and Third World women. In the US for instance the early stress on the sexual and gender difference which later on shifted towards the emphasis on the differences between women, is often seen as a point of differentiation between second and third wave feminism (Freedman 1998). Susan Stanford Freedman argues that in US, although black and lesbian feminist early on made attempts to destabilize such approaches first difference discourse emerged as a need to

define the common ground for oppression of all women and quickly evolved into the critiques of the sex/gender oppression systems characteristic to the second wave feminism. The appropriation of the so called French feminist theories; both intensified and distorted the emphasis on the differences between women and men as they pointed to symbolic and linguistic origins of the “sexual” differences, the ways in which the experience has been produced by various discourses and extend of instability of the male/female, masculinity/femininity dichotomies.

On the other hand the emphasis on the differences between women has been emerging as a result of the belief that the women’s oppression cannot be framed solely in terms of “gender”. Women of color pointed to double or multiply oppressions experienced by various groups of women and delineated two aspects of exclusionary representation practices within feminism; under-representation of some groups of women- exclusion of their experience from the feminist inquiry and their misrepresentation- “othering” Audrey Lorde who brought up the concept of difference and “put the black lesbian” at the heart of the feminist debates of 1980 become the key writer for the “multi cultural feminist theoretization”. While conceptualizing the idea of the “house of difference”, Lorde pointed the importance of various multiply and overlapping positionalities from which feminist as theory and practice emerges (Lorde 1985). Lorde insisted that differences of race, sexuality, and class should not be ignored and treated as “problem” of feminist or the “other” oppressions of women. To the opposite, she argued they should be recognized as a source of power in feminism. Third world feminists developed the critique of those aspects of the practice of “othering”, which within the context of transnational feminism lead to the patronizing attitude

employed by western feminisms to represented women from non-western locations as passive victims of their patriarchal cultures (Spivak 1986). In the context of representation politics Gayatri Spivak and Chandra Mohanty argued that it is the structure of the contemporary feminist knowledge production within the US academy that causes reproduction of the idea of Third World Women as the “other” (Mohnty 2003). Famously raised by Chandra Mohanty question of the difference between ”women” as a cultural and ideological amalgam of the “other” constructed through diverse representational discourses and “women” the real material subjects and their collective history became an impulse for re-conceptualization of the “identity” as mediated through intersecting experience of race, class and ethnicity and geographical location.

All these new formulations of subjectivity called for the revision of traditional feminist “identity politics” as based on the standpoint epistemology according to which women, as a group share collective, experience that gives them better insight to social “reality” (Moya 1997, Mohanty 2003). The examination of difference, often painful and conflicted gradually replaced the idea of the unified women’s experience, which became the core concept of the early versions of standpoint epistemology (Hartsock 1987, Smith 1987) and identity politics. In the context of post-communist Poland however widely discussed within the Western and Third world feminisms issues of the differences *between* women are rarely verbalized. In Polish feminists discourse that focuses on building distinguishable identity against conservatism the question of difference, is I believe too easily dismissed and relegated to consideration of conservative expressions of grassroots women usually representing, like Catholic women “other place” and or “other” ideology. Differences that go beyond acceptable variety of being feminist are barely

acknowledged, more often abided in the name of “respecting cultural differences”.

Feminist wariness of the “difference” of course, happens for a reason. On the one hand the „equality feminism“ understood as a part of liberal/ individualistic project, and opposed to „difference feminism“ is by all means the most influential discourse in the Polish feminism. Historically liberal equality of free individuals is perceived as counter-hegemonic to, represented by communism equality as sameness for all. Communist collectivism, which denied individuality and forced group’s identities on individuals, is many times interpreted as captivating. As a reaction to forced collectivity, after the fall of communism and re-introduction of democracy various groups have eagerly and uncritically incorporated individualistic liberalism as the only possible discourse of social justice. As most of the feminist activists represent themselves as proponents of „equality feminism“, equality usually denominates equal “freedom for all” as it is understood in the liberal tradition. Such framed equality feminism is opposed to feminism of difference and it determines narrowing down the idea of difference to the terms of the possibility of the full realization of one’s needs and desires regardless one’s sex/gender. The “difference feminism” as opposed to “equality feminism” is alleged as both, originating from the idea of the essential differences between women and men and radical. Radicalism in many cases is identified as a revolutionary and as such is dismissed as a reminiscence of the communist past.

Postcolonial critiques and transnational feminisms, for which over the years the question of difference became paradigmatic, often emphasize antithetical and contradictory relation between the difference and identity. Putting the debate on identity/difference in the context of spirituality and feminism Lela Fernandes proposes an

approach to social change that, while focusing of various forms of feminist practices, builds on a process of misidentification. Fernandes understands misidentification as a twofold process of letting go all attachments to externalized forms identity and deeper ego-based attachments to power, privilege and control. She conceptualizes it as a positive movement, which starts with investigating what remains after the refutation of all identities that we have. Struggling with the bare self requires the very opposite of the safe space, which feminism often looks for one that emerges from the “pure”, stable and unquestioned feminist identity (Fernandes 2000).

Susan Freedman however argues the questions of identity and difference are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Freedman 2001). Freedman reminds us that the term identity has a double and contradictory resonance. On the one hand “identity” means sameness and involves the perception of the commonalities. The process of acquiring identity in such sense involves foregrounding one aspect of the identity and backgrounding the others; differentiation. On the other hand thus to acquire the identity one has to recognize the difference between herself, and members of her identity groups and the others. Although, Freedman argues, none of the categories in the identity discourses such as race, class and sexuality, are stable and fixed, they are all produced in the historicized discourses, and are subject to change; the formation of any category requires “symbolic perception of sameness with some and difference from others” (Freedman, 75). Facing identity/difference conundrum Freedman’s suggests that the concept of hybridity can present the possibility of conceptualizing the identities in making. In her understanding of hybridity Freedman follows Rosaldo, who argues:

On the one hand, hybridity can imply a space betwixt and between two zones of purity in a manner that follows biological usage that distinguishes two discrete spaces and the

hybrid pseudo-spaces that results from their combination... On the other hand, hybridity can be understood as the ongoing condition of all human cultures, which contain no zones of purity because they undergo continuous processes of transculturation (two way borrowing and lending between cultures). Instead of hybridity versus purity, this view suggests that it is hybridity all the way down (foreword, xv-xvi)

In such approach the pure identities do not exist, are more of the symbolic concepts, political tools and discursive figures. Bakhtin's and Bhaba's add to such conceptualization of hybridity the crucial aspect of agency, arguing that agency emerges within the hybridity as product of various intersecting narratives, discourses and concepts (Bakhtin 1993, Bhaba 1994). In such sense hybridity is at the same time a routine of human condition and the indispensable agent of the social change, hybrid or „traveling“ identities are thus ones that carry the potential of transgression and a potential to destabilize the binary dichotomies; masculinity/ femininity, reason/ spirit, first/ third world, identity/difference.

Within such framed difference/ identity debate Catholic feminists in Poland represent the hybridity that goes beyond, seen as contradictory discourses of identity and difference. In a sense their identities can also be seen as instances of the “traveling” or border identities that, as Gloria Anzaldua argues emerge where the interplay of contradictory sources of power and oppression, “home” and alienation takes place. Anzaldua's „migratory“ identities calls depend on the movement between different meanings and politics. As borderland these identities are often painful, contradictory and conflicted. Analyzing the cultural hybridity of the Mexican identity Anzaldua point to the historic, temporal and multilayered character of the cultures, the fact that they consist on the layers of conquest and draw from diverse tradition of power and representation.

Anzaldua goes into the tradition of Mexican syncretism pointing to the various meanings of the representations of women, particularly the figure of Madonna. Madonna she argues descends Aztec fertility goddesses particularly Tonantsi, the good mother, and Coatlicue, the sinister mother. This Aztec version of the Christian virgin whose duality is misogynist transformation of the Mesoamerican fertility deity, the Serpent Goddess Coatlicue, who braggars the duality of light and dark and serves in the text as Anzaldua muse and guardian spirit of the borderland state. In many ways the „traveling“ identities of Polish feminist represent similar construction of the subjectivity in which the diverse layers and aspects of Catholicism, Polishness and feminism are apparent beneath the seemingly „pure“ and sharply outlined identities (Anzaldua 1999).

Finally the idea of hybridity, which is most often conceptualized within the context of colonialism, emerges as a consequence of asymmetrical power relations between the center and the periphery. Religion in that context has been a tool of both colonization and the part of nationalistic postcolonial revival. Many postcolonial critics argue that secularism has not proved to be an adequate framework for managing religious diversity and preventing religious conflict; for instance some have suggested that secularism often incorporates elements of the dominant religion in a country and does not actually separate religion from the state (Nagar 2002, Nandy 1990, Fernandes 2000). Some also suggested that secularism should be seen as ideology developed in the West that was imposed on non-Western countries through colonialism (Chatterjee 1989, Nandy 1990, Pui-lan 2002). The ways westerners approach traditional religions and emphasize their regressive attitude, for instance perceive Buddhism and Hinduism as static and unchanging, many recognize as an instance of colonial practice of “othering” (Pui-lan 2002). Within such

colonial framing gender is often times used as a material to create the dynamics of submission and dominance; as women are usually represented as passive, powerless victims of traditional cults. In feminism, religion, and particularly the practices of the traditional, non-western religions was also used by western theorists such as Mary Daly, as a proof of the existence of the universal patriarchy (Kwo Pui-lan 2002).

In this context both Fernades and Anzaldua argue that local, grassroots women's struggles can play a crucial role in "decolonizing" spirituality, by both regaining the territory of spirituality from traditional religions, and destabilizing the representation of feminism as secular. In many ways postcolonial countries have been more successful in reclaiming the spiritual territory of women's identity previously „colonized" by religious fundamentalism. In her *Borderlands/La Frontera* Gloria Anzaldua theorizes the concept of the *new mestiza*, the "new woman" that represents the move from the shameful identity of the "other" to the creative and empowered identity in making. *Mestiza* consciousness arises at the intersection, the borderland of different sets of social contexts including, but not limited to, relations of class, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, religion and geographical location. As embedded in a multitude of conflicting social relations *mestiza* is both forced upon as a mark of the oppression and a site of possible freedom. Through transformation from an outcast to the transgressive female figure capable of reaching beyond fixed and pure identities *mestiza* constitutes a power that unsettles purism and hegemony.

New mestiza consciousness is an apotheosis of an identity characterized by hybridity, flexibility, and plurality that emerges at the intersection of layers, of cultural experiences, narratives and symbols. In her writings Anzaldua's makes a case for the nomad, plural,

outcast identities, inclined to break down dualistic, hegemonic paradigms and culturally determined roles imposed on individuals and people. *Mestiza* is a pariah, a queer, a deviant, who goes beyond labels that express desire to mark people as acceptable or unacceptable. It is a driving force behind the tolerance for contradiction, tolerance for ambiguity.

The construction of the *mestiza* depends on the recovery of multiply layers of the narratives that fuse and mix various women figures crucial to certain culture. As it arises within the uncertain space of borderland, in which various locales and temporalities intersect, *mestiza's* identity takes from different cultures; indigenous, European, feminist. It bridges and balances opposing worlds and reinforces itself through variety of celebrations and rituals. It therefore engages in a dialectical process that transcends identities through connecting spiritualities and ritual to community, justice and social change.

Is the concept of the traveling self is translatable in to the context of Central Eastern Europe? What are the particular intellectual, cultural and spiritual spaces at the borders of which the potentiality of the hybrid identity emerges? What is Polish *mestiza*? Conceptualized as hybrid Catholic feminists identities can be seen as representing “decolonizing” potential in Polish feminism. It is Catholic feminists transgression that produces the transformation both through contesting “foreign” secular paradigm and traditional Polish (secular) Catholicism. Understood as incorporation of non-rationality based practices into the social justice movements spirituality however is not necessarily directly linked to any specific religion. Indeed Catholic and other non-secular feminists in Poland are looking for such quasi feminists and quasi religious niches in which the

experience of spirituality can come into being in-between, their feminists and/or religious identities. As a person located at the intersection of academe, feminism and Catholicism, Jowanka was looking for the approach that would allow her to destabilize the series of dichotomies that lied behind the choice that she was expected to make between feminism-Catholicism; rationality/ irrationality, science/religion, reason and spirit. In 2000, while remaining within the Catholic Church, she became part of yet another spiritual women only community; “Krag”- women’s circle that has been drawing from the “paradigm of irrationality” played a crucial role in her feminist-spiritual journey:

I liked the ecologic background in (the circle) for I have always felt the relationship to the nature, environment (...) For a long time then I have been a rationalist. But the unknown things also drove me; like my dreams. The dreams’ reality was exciting, but at the same very non-scientific, irrational. I was very much attached to this scientific side of me and I think I managed not to have to abandon it. I realized that I can become spiritual without abandoning this academic side of me (r21)

As it became the way to employ the ideal of social justice in an attempt to (re)connect experience of feminism with the broader social context for Jowanka Krag constituted a potential remedy for broader crisis within feminism, one that represents the inability to link the feminist theories to the practice of the political and social transformation at the local, national and global level:

For me it was something that’s been temporary. I compare it the women’s churches, women’s spiritual communities. It is the moment when women in church or culture or society cannot speak and they are not able to know who they really are since they are always in relation to men. And the role of the community is to find out who they are. The critique of sex/gender is been suspended because you see people, as they are different but

the same sex/gender. You can work things out and experience things in the safe women's world. But eventually if you want to live normal in the normal world you have to be in relations with men (r21)

Beyond Church wars- new spirituality “Krag”: Women in the circle

In Kasia's case the misery that began accompanying her feminist activism and academic work, initiated the trajectory to non-religious women's spiritual community. At certain point in her life Kasia experienced a sense of disconnection between theory and practice, the feeling of overwhelm and inability to grasp problems that appeared “too big” to be solved. She recollects realizing that the practical problems of women are not removable after the actions she has been undertaking:

The fact that I was doing Manifa from time to time, that I was in the hip-hop band or made the feminist cabaret or put the posters on the street or write an article, it all seemed to be not enough cause there is this whole private life, inner life which I had no idea what to do with. I think the people who moved from feminism to the „circle” needed to rebuilt themselves internally, they felt exhausted and needed some time for themselves (r27)

She has been an academic, devoted labor union organizer and the member of the newly established Polish Labor Party for over 10 years now but couple years ago Kasia confesses, she started to feel political exhaustion. Overpowered by the feelings of restlessness, discontent and powerlessness, she could no longer manage the bare the “public” perception of her, as the one who “knows” the answers to the questions about possibility of social change on the other. Kasia became disillusioned with the idea that „it is enough to think to have a ideology and consciousness to remove the patriarchy from

oneself". Joining Krag, she was hoping, would help her to bring out her intellectual path and social activism, to the other, spiritual level:

For me it was a continuation of the Irigaray's thought. I got to know about the „circle" through my feminist friends, people very „political". But what was going on there was more like the embodiment of the some of the feminist theories (...) At some point I had a feeling that I know everything, I'm absolutely conscious, I knew what is what, but I also had a sense that it doesn't work. The knowledge that I had didn't work. It doesn't work because it doesn't change anything. It's from my head (...) This is what I thought about feminism. That I know very well what is women's oppression and the sexual market of women as subjects. But the texts that I have read didn't really show any way out of this situation. And I had the feeling that this way I have to find on my own. I didn't' however have a feeling that my involvement in the „circle" will replace my political involvement. It was, rather, a way of deepening it (r27)

Founded at the beginning of the 1998 as a therapeutic community and women's support group, Krag is focusing on the broadly defined experience of womanhood. As it consists on the circle of women, feminists and non-feminists, Krag works partially as a consciousness rising group, to which the idea of the spirituality is central:

For me politics is a kind of confrontation with the external world, and when we did act out in the public space we, even partially have been taking over this space, we were leaving the trace of ourselves there. I had a feeling that I've been visually transforming this city. And for me it was something that no internal revolution will ever be able to replace. But, without this internal revolution, I could no longer go on (r27).

Although, as, many women's who joined Krag didn't perceive a need for internal rejuvenation, reconnecting with body and other women as contradictory to political activism, many feminist leaders recognized the turned to spirituality as a symptomatic to

de-politization of feminism and a move towards the essentialism. Many as Agnieszka, argued that maintaining the separation of the private (spiritual) practices of feminists from its public (rational) appearances is crucial if feminist movement to remain a fit into the standards of public sphere. Hanka identifies the move towards spirituality both as a new direction and the blind spot of Polish feminism:

One of the paths of is going towards essentialism, this whole new age, therapeutic, menstruation stream you know... What I at least can accept in this stream is Wen-Do. But I mean if someone comes to the Manifa meeting and pulls out the menstruation calendar in which there are very weird things and ladies in robes drink their own blood, then if media will see it they right the way add it to the stereotype of the feminist, a which (r13)

Yet again as in case of Catholicism, feminist hostility towards Krag resulted in some women's departure from the movement. Natalia's decision to abandon the institutional feminist movement intersected with both; the desire to become a mother and the lack of understanding of her need for the spiritual development that she has experienced in the movement. For 5 years Natalia has been a gender studies student, feminist NGOs staff, the cofounder of the informal feminist group Ulica Siostrzana, and a feminist journalist. As she joined one of the „women's circle” in Warsaw, Natalia started redefining her feminism:

If you don't realize some of the old, unconscious structures, even if you become the political leader you will always multiply them in your work. Even if you are the most active feminist, you have prestige and power. If you have these patriarchal structures inside you will never change anything in the world. (...) The whole idea is that woman's power is in the stomach (gut), women power, strength, intuition and wisdom are in the stomach where symbolically and not symbolically the life can happen, or it might not. If

women will regain this awareness, that they have such an impact on the world, then everything will change (r2)

To appreciate the body and to challenge, and eventually destabilize the body-mind dichotomy is central for Natalia experience in the circle:

Regaining those stomachs that were violently taken away from us; cut of, divided into mind and body, wise and stupid, female and male, into this super mind and this dirty, junk bottom, if we regain it and if it will come together, because nobody is saying that we shouldn't use our brains, then the woman will regain her power. And then she won't be manipulated, and then she will be the mistress of her life and she can create life the way she wishes. This is what the circle is about. The body is crucial here it plays fundamental role. The body is not something worse; it is not something, which is external as it sometimes is in feminism. As if it wasn't mine it wasn't me, as if I didn't have experiences related to this body. There is a lot written (in feminism) about regaining body, menstruation, birth giving and so on but it is more external so to say (r2)

Questioning the body mind dichotomy also means to erase the dichotomy between the rational and spiritual. While the body is perceived as material it is also the center and the source of the spiritual experience, and the first instance of knowledge, as reason and outside world are perceived as often distracting:

The experience is very important in the circle; it is the most important thing. There is no that the book said so our authority said so, or the scientific theory. Woman's experience is the most important. If the woman experiences something good or bad it is the most important, it is the key that builds the world... not that somebody has written something (r2)

The debate over the status of groups such as women's circle within the feminist politics brings up, crucial for feminist debates question of women's experience, its individual and

collective character and spiritual and material origins. Early versions of standpoint theory represented women as a group as sharing common experience, based upon the sex/gender systems of oppression. While such “essentialist” approach to women’s subjectivity and therefore simplify the question of the experience of unmediated “gender”, postmodernism on the other hand claims that identity is purely a social construct and rejects any given identities as arbitrary and being created by the dominating discourses. Identities, scholars like Butler argues, are not given or /and fixed but rather produced and reproduced by dominating narratives and performed by the individuals (Butler 1990). Postmodern “subject’s” identity is unstable shifting, and contradictory. As cognitive “experience” is contradictory, shifting and unstable it has no relation materiality, postmodern subject are unable to claim any kind of identity. Authors such as Reagon, Moya and Mohanty pointed to the dead ends of both approaches; attempts to create the ideal community of “global sisterhood” and individualistic postmodernist approaches in which the question of identity is reduced to the “private” question of the performing self (Reagon 1998, Mohanty, 2003, Moya 1997, Scott 1992), As based on the consciousness rising and bringing together feminist and non-feminist to the certain extend “Krag” breaks up with the fixed feminist identity and it looks for the roots of women’s experience in the materiality of their daily lives. Although it doesn’t go beyond the binary conceptualization of the “difference” and still operates within the oppositional terms of female-male and utilizes the ideas of the “common” women’s experience, the conceptualization of the experience in the circle while centering the bodily and spiritual experience attempts to destabilize the fixed idea of being a feminist. The experience of “body politics” is, Natalia believes common to all women:

I think that the assumption is that there is a common women's experience, or the common experience of the certain group of women... there is an assumption that there is certain spiritual (experience) beyond all the standpoints and minds and so on... (r12)

In particular cases it also allows to make sense of the major experiences in life, such as motherhood and frame them in the spiritual discourse:

And it originates from the contact with life, with the source, with the powers of life that you can incorporate in your life into various aspects. In the circle not all the women share such standpoint, and it is a kind of religion or cult. The cult of the Mother, the goddess, Dakini (...) And it is symbolic...it is not that she kills or doesn't kill somebody, by giving or not giving birth she is experiencing the world. It is about birth giving. But not only this, the circle originates from the idea that there is a power in the earth, so we are into all of the ecological stuff. It all relates to feeling and experience. So if someone has a center in his or her brains she will leave the circle right away. And many experiences if you transmit them through your head they will appear as not interesting... like the experience of motherhood, it might seem not interesting or not valuable (r3).

Although for some women, Krag has indeed become a kind of religious community and lead to the departure from politics, for most women Krag instantiates the space within which they could practice what Nell Noddings calls "skeptical spirituality". "Skeptical spirituality" Noddings argues can be useful as a tool for the appropriation of the language of religion to approach secular purposes (Noddings 2003). In the context of fundamentalisms in which religion(s) in general have done more harm than good in the world, it allows to hold on to the idea of spirituality itself, and provides women with the possibility to find their own spirituality their own path personal growth beyond institutionalized churches. Again, as a practice "skeptical spirituality", goes beyond

secure identities, it lacks certainty, and moreover assurance that is to be found in the traditional religions. But as it adds strength to personal life, joy, the skeptical spirituality may become the source of personal fulfillment and political vitality. Noddings concept is also open for difference, women look for their spirituality in various venues, they employ number of ways regaining spirituality through, meditation, being in the circle/community of women. “Some are motivated to seek the good by obedience of religion, some by motherhood, some by friendship, some by universal compassion, some by combination of many sources” argues Noddings (Noddings 2003). For some, like Natalia the ritual becomes the source of spiritual fulfillment:

This a community, whose leader is building on the native American tradition of being in the circle...it is not only the name, since Indians believed that everybody is equal being in the circle, there is below and above... our tradition that we are building upon is taken from Seneca Indians, very peaceful and matriarchal Indians. The Indians you, know are different but this very woman centered story is present there... so there is a circle with 12 places each of them represents some aspect of the truth...it is all about the truth... that there is no one, objective truth. And we discover what it is. This is the first tool, which the community is built upon, that is a circle. Being in the circle is being its part, because you are piece of it. We try to introduce old matriarchal- pagan traditions, I don't know if Polish, because it is not like someone sat down and discovered it. It is more based on intuition, feelings... We have a lot of ceremonies, our own, that we created ourselves. At the beginning we draw a lot from tradition, now you can create your own ceremony, there is no problem here (r3).

In other cases, like Kasia's the spirituality becomes a means through which one attempts to connect feminist activism, emotional needs of women's activists and the

broader social context in a form of what Gloria Anzaldua and Jacqui Alexander have called “spiritual activism”(Anzaldua 1999 Alexander 2005). “Spiritual activists” work to transform all structures of hierarchy and exclusion their actions are based on spiritualized understanding of themselves as both individuals and as part of larger interconnected world. Activism rooted in spirituality also represents “the sense of the self, which contains within a radical interconnection between all of us that necessarily transcends narrower forms of identification” (Alexander 2005). This self is neither independent nor autonomous; spirituality is also not a way to escape from the materialism of the life. Dualistic oppositions of freedom and dependency, material and spiritual do not exist in such understanding of activism. Moreover focusing solely on what Alzandua calls “external structures of cage of rationality”, “the official reality of the rational” may disable one’s possibility of connection to and understanding of the world. The external structures of power can never be fully approached if one is not ready to simultaneously transform the internal workings of power that exists within oneself. The redressing of the oppression structures cannot be thus simply reduced to the list of social inequalities and identities, which must be addressed; race gender sexuality, but has to begin with the radical, spiritual transformation of the self (Alzandua 1999).

In the intrudtion to their collection “Philosophy, Feminism and Faith” Marya Bower and Ruth Groenhout distinguish three strategies to deal with contradictory experiences of feminism, philosophy and religion (Bower and Groenhout 2003). First is to argue that in many ways the seemingly contradictory selves can fit together with the little effort. Ostensibly opposite elements of religion and feminism can in fact be seen as complementary, they are crucial to individual lives and can be seen by those individuals

as compatible and reinforcing. Such is an instance of those Catholic feminists in Poland that perceive both, feminism and Catholicism as variations of the same “equality” philosophy. Others argue that although the unification of the contradictory elements of religion and feminism is impossible to achieve, to live with paradox of intersectional salve can, in fact be fruitful. Those women, such as Polish Catholic feminists who struggle with the “epistemic dissonance” refuse to settle for primary, fixed identity. In that sense they represent a case of border identities that emerge in the space in between and destabilize the current understanding of what is and what is not acceptable. The proponents of the final approach argue for the need of going beyond the fixed and separate identity and to create some kind of new conception of religion or spirituality, or secularization of the religious tradition. They seek for the new source of the strength and hope for social change and they leave being the traditional labels. Some disputing the possibility of using both religious and feminists labels as sufficient and informative in the narrative of one’s identity They argue that contradictory identities, pieces of identities can come together in one’s broader commitment, to tradition, community or social justice.

The possibility of involving the spiritual power in the feminist struggles for social change is usually missing in traditional feminist approaches. More currently the revival of the religiosity, in various Central Eastern European and Asian locations as well as globally is most often perceived in terms of the danger of the religious fundamentalism that has never been good for women. Some authors argue however that even though we tend associate religiosity with radicalism and violence, the vast majority of emerging spiritual communities is not committed to violence at all (Ahmed 2002). Moreover

women constitute most of the individuals who utilize religion and spirituality as a site of mobilization and emancipation and the space in which they can exercise their agency. Significant discourses focusing on women and religion in the context of geopolitics, modernity, nationalism and ethnicity are now being raised in the South, where the religious revival is often reaction to the corruption of the political elites, wide spreading poverty and the rapid modernizations, phenomenon that mostly affect the lives of women. The brutal excesses of fundamentalism in the South have both highlighted and obscured the complex relation between women and religion. On one hand fundamentalism are highly anti- gender equality, on the other women get more and more involved in the religious discourses on spirituality. In the introduction to the collection “Gendering the spirit: women and religion & the post-colonial response” Durre Ahmed argues:

For women in the south especially there is an unstoppable momentum towards revisiting this most primordial and enduring human concerns since it is they who bear the burnt of what is frequently a brutal vision of religion. While this is particularly so in certain Muslim societies the issue is equally problematic in terms of psychological social and physical repression that is imposed on women by all religious traditions. To insist the validity of religion in this circumstance is an act of courage. It is not however a brute kind of courage that comes simply as a survival instinct of some pitifully trapped animal. On the contrary, it is courage gained through a creative enjoyment with religion in which faith and different types of sacred and secular knowledge reinforce each other. Rather than simply “deconstructing” and reducing religion to social, economic and historical elements, this approach embraces it in a manner that challenges *status quo*. Drawing from a range of historical, cultural. Theological and imaginative discourses such a position is sustained by both a critical analysis of the causes on religious oppression and a creative provisioning of its elements (Ahmed 2002, 9)

In Poland the possibility of “spiritual feminism” is often dismissed based upon the assumption that “those who think cannot believe and those who believe cannot think”, which represents intellectual, also feminist elites genuine belief in the superiority of the rationalist thought. The mixture of the devotion to the liberal individualistic model, which is hesitant towards any attempts to conceptualize the equality and social justice in terms of groups or collectivity, universalizing language of some feminists and hesitancy to open up feminist discourse onto Catholic feminists in the name of homogenous identity appear to be major contradiction within the Polish feminism’s conceptualization of the difference. While the liberal and individualistic discourses remain dominant, the potential and the threats of women’s positionality within religious communities remain ignored by intellectuals and activists. Although there is a vast variety and diversity in women’s movement in Poland (lesbians, mothers and young women are to the certain extend visible and present in the movement) Polish society is seen as highly homogenous. It is widely assumed that in societies such as Poland the fundamental differences between women, such as those of race, do not exist. Following such premise many feminists insist on maintaining the language that represents women as homogenous group.

Identity politics has been crucial arena, which feminists and social activists have both criticized current political situation in the country and used as a basis for mobilization. Conceptualization of the collective feminist identities in Poland often rests on bounded definitions and identification. In feminism certain version of “identity” politics forced upon by the necessity to face “common enemy”- Catholic Church makes a dialog between Catholicism and feminism impossible. As feminist identities struggles are emerging against the conservative, rights wing discourse, which Catholic Church most

vividly represents, the dominant style of action has been constructed around binary dichotomy „we“ versus „them“. The issues of reproductive rights and abortion, which are the pinpoint of the debate over feminist identity further immobilize the dialogue between Catholic feminist and they secular counterparts. Within such social context „difference“ represented by Catholic women is caught in the „either or“ discourse in which feminism is located on the side of secularism while Catholicism on the side of religious fundamentalism. However identity based movements while more distinguishable and thus efficient in the public sphere often end up putting restrictions on the criteria of belonging. Such restrictions serve as an obstacle for the connectivity with the broader social context, various conceptions of social justice and thus ultimately disable possibility of social transformation. Facing the hierarchies, hegemonies and exclusions that come along with the identity based politics, centering the difference and exploring the transformative potential of the hybrid, border identity can ultimately serve a platform for a lasting strategy for-transformative social justice.

Finally the way in which Catholic feminism is located within the broader feminist community in Poland, represents in the broader sense the positionality of Polish feminism within the broader Polish society and the gap that many feminist experience between themselves and the majority of Poles. Hanka argues:

In the Third World countries the nationalistic, traditionalistic narrative that is part of women's subjectivity is more acceptable for the feminism. It is more possible to transform by the feminism there then Polish Catholicism for Polish feminists. It is because in Poland the left wing elite that is a background of the feminism, has its origins in the anti-church, atheistic tradition, more that in the right wing tradition (r13)

In many ways such statements oversimplify the Polish feminist identity, particularly in the context of the presence of the Catholic feminist in the movement. The emphasis put on the political nature of the religious in Poland, while justified from the perspective of the growing Catholic fundamentalism many time overshadows the nature of the spiritual experience of religious feminists. By many of my respondents as well women analyzed in Joanna Tomaszewska's work the spiritual needs have been perceived as detached from both the experience of religion in feminism, and the political religiosity. While excluding Catholic women from feminist identity many leaders project political identity of the Church on these women. In doing so feminists not only "other" the religious feminist but also do not recognize the merit of their spiritual experience. Spirituality, faith, Enlightenment and the divine the topics avoided in the feminists debates are the core of this experience of Catholicism. Quoted in this chapter many times already Leela Fernandes argues that transformation of the feminist practice, understood as both activism and knowledge production, requires an explicit engagement with questions of spirituality. If movements for social justice are to be fully transformative, they must be based on some understanding of the connection between the spiritual and the material realms. The displacement of the questions of spirituality has served to restrain the potential of women's movements and activism. The activism that rests on rational-spiritual dichotomy, which secular feminists have put forth persisted despite very real material existence of spirituality within feminism. Symbolic counter-positionality of the rational and spiritual represents, in Poland as in many other class power dynamics within feminism. Decolonization of the feminism must thus start from challenging the class structure:

Spiritual learning in this sense is not necessarily to be gained from simply reading religious texts, it is to be gained from those who are subordinated and oppressed (...) The lesson was not that the poor were an idealized embodiment of virtue, but that their struggles for survival and transformation provided them with a form of spiritual wisdom which more privileged individuals needed to learn from. It should not be surprising then, then that some of the deepest spiritual insights have come from poor and activists working with the poor-indigenous people struggling against environmental destruction and genocide, women of color in US and internationally and from those who have struggled with these marginalized groups (Fernandes 2002, 117)

Indeed as some of the studies show that for many poor and rural women, such as supporters of radio Maryja, spirituality is a way of emancipation (Hryciuk i Kościańska 2005). Feminist ethnologies included in the first of the kind anthology *Women and Religions* suggest that while feminist discourse does not reach women from lower classes and rural areas they employ various forms of forms of non-western spirituality, ritual matriarchy to mark their social and further political subjectivity. These recent studies indicate an important shift in the feminist scholarly and street theory and practice: a move towards re-rooting Polish feminist discourses in the local narratives and linking them to already existing feminist debates on ethnicity and cultural identity.

Chapter Five: “*I love my country too*”. Lesbians, Jewish feminists and the location of strangers in Polish culture.



“I love my country too”

On March 28, 2008, Yga, the head of the biggest lesbian organization in Poland, „the feminist, ecologist, lesbian and the happy illegal wife“, posted a following note on her blog:

I’m one of those who, rather than talk and runaway, will try to increase the quality of life, at least in my own yard (...) I describe myself as a „patriot“ and I’m sorry that right now this term has right wing connotations. I couldn’t live in US or any country in Europe for long. I’m tied here with the invisible string. I can travel, yes, or even go away for couple of months. But I couldn’t

start a new life somewhere abroad (...) Of course it is a matter of friends and family. Also what I do, who I am here, and what I'm involved in. I know I have a lot to do here, and I know how to do it. And I love Polish home-cooking:). (chylkiem-I-duszekiem.blog.onet.pl)

This declaration was posted during a particularly important time of year in Poland. A couple of days earlier, in Cracow, the 3rd March for Tolerance devoted to equality for gays and lesbians, had attracted thousands of people. On March 8, 2008, International Women's Day, the 9th Warsaw Manifa took place. Last year, the International Women's Day celebration seemed to be, in part, at least devoted to the reflection on the meaning of *Polishness*. First of all, the idea of nation and national symbols, such as Polish flags have made it to the feminist Manifa as a part of the demonstration's narrative.



2008 Manifa.

The national flag, held by trade union activists, men and women of various ages popped up all over the diverse crowd, next to feminist slogans („We Demand Right to Vote for Our Fate“, „Good Health for The Ladies“ and „All for Free Choice“ and next to the rainbow flags and gay and lesbian movements' banners. Some banners referred directly

to the idea of patriotism; a young girl wearing all pink, was for instance holding a sign stating „I love my country too“



Manifa 2008 “We demand right to vote for our fate”, “Good health for the ladies”



Photo 3. Młodzież Wszechpolska’s counter demonstration 2008 (“Stop abortion”)

On the other hand , usually vigorous counter demonstration of Młodzież Wschepolska (All Poland Youth) looked poorly attended and its participants seem lost. Their slogans and transperents were not sending a clear message either. One of them, quite obviously refereeing to the feminist-communist slur, stated „Femingrad“, was displayed next to the “Feminist Manifesto’s” board and accompanied *Communist International* playing loudly enough to almost block the speeches by the feminist and union activists (see photo no. 4). The attempt to reference „feminazi” was made through the red flag, resembling those of the Third Reich, with one exception; there was a female sign instead of swastika in the center of them. While this rhetoric has been familiar to the Polish public for years now, it was in the context of the newly emerged “feminist patriotism” that right wing slogans seemed particularly odd, contradictory, and out of their element. Why in the eyes of Neonazis, the idea of feminazi would even be a negative thing? It seemed like the right wing had run out of ideas about how to antagonize feminists and the Polish society. While feminist utilize the idea of Polishness more and more, claiming their right to the public space, narrative and the traditions of Poland; the right wing groups desperately try to represent “minorities” as radical “others”.

Bringing together women and “others” – historically represented most vividly by the Polish Jews – in radical right discourses is significant as March is also an important month for Jews in Poland. Last year, the 30th anniversary of „March events” was celebrated. This was the last nation wide Anti-Semitic campaign, which resulted in departure of the 30 thousands Jews from Poland. For many people, particularly those occupying the subalterns of Polish public space, this time of year prompts a reflection on the meaning of Polishness. Two of days earlier, I met with Irena, feminist literary critic,

activist and one of the creators of the first Manifa, to talk about her Polish-Jewish feminist identity. She too wanted to reflect on her and her family's relation to "Poland" and the place of feminism within current Polish public space:

As for me, I feel I'm Jewish, but already before the war my grandparent were people who assimilated; my grandmother was a Protestants and my grandfather was baptized. They were of course Jews, and they survived the war barely, but they aspire to this culture, they included themselves in it. And so my mom was part of the Protestant community in Poland and we all were baptized.For me of course feminism has its roots in the leftist tradition of Polish intelligentsia: socially engaged and emancipatory. In this tradition, Jews were included. It was also their tradition (...) (Feminists) are not different. I don't feel excluded. Maybe it is because I became a mainstream person; popular and recognized. I'm present in media and associated with feminism. And I see the place of feminism differently, as strongly pronounced (...) (r32)

This chapter considers new ways in which Polish feminists engage with local and global discourses of difference, otherness and strangeness. It asks how the complex imbrication and intersection of global and local discourses shape the experience of lesbian and Jewish feminists and particularly how it contributes to the emergence of the controversial analogy between the fate of Polish Jews and Polish sexual minorities. Conceptualizing the location of Jewish and lesbian feminists, I utilize the concept of the "stranger" developed by Zygmunt Bauman, a Polish Jewish philosopher whose trajectory of exile became part of his work on social exclusion and the condition of modern and postmodern societies. Bauman's "strangers," are "neither we nor clearly they, not friend, not an enemy". The figure of the stranger is crucial for the current pos-modern cultures and societies as s/he exemplifies both an "ambivalence that troubles the border between us and them," and an

“inappropriate other” (Bauman 1991). Claiming the public space from the subalterns, minorities, and lesbians, feminists challenge the existing conception of a homogenous Polish citizenship. In the conclusion of this chapter, I examine the possibility of *queering* citizenship in Poland and ask how the new conceptualization of citizenship intersects with transformation of the feminist discourses in Poland: their diversification and fragmentation.

“Gay, meaning a Jew”?- A re-direction of the nationalistic “hate speech” and reinvention of the feminist discourse

Over the last 20 years, xenophobic and nationalistic rhetoric represented by the slogans such as “Where there is a Gay, there is a Jew,” “Will do with You, what Hitler did with Jews!” has become a cultural code to which Polish public sphere is widely receptive (Graff 2007). Many authors trace the process of the racialization of homosexuality that has been noticable in Poland since the fall of state socialism to the 19th century German and Polish nationalistic discourses, in which representations of ethnic minorities such as Jews and Gypsies along with homosexuals as public offenders, conspirators and pariah were conceptualized as a threat to national (heterosexual) masculinity (Mosses 2000, Ostolski 2007). Nineteenth century nationalism, in Poland and in Germany represented sexual strangers- homosexuals and national minorities particularly Jews as decadent and degenerate, a symbol of modern urban and/or economic decadence (Giland 1985, Mosses 1985). In such discourses, both Jews and homosexuals denoted the ‘types’, physically and culturally different from the what was regarded as the proper body of normal citizens (Arendt 1963) Difference and decadence appropriated to Jews and

homosexuals embodied at the same time sexual danger, a threat of seduction, and temptation for conversion.

The representation of the figures of Jews and homosexuals as at the same time disgusting and tempting prevailed after the Second World War as in communist Poland, both groups have epitomized “bourgeoisie” individuals, embracing middle class life style, capitalistic values and consumptions: major threats to the healthy socialist society (Glowinski 1996). After the fall of state-socialism neoconservative groups, particularly All Polish Youth- an organization consisting of young conservative men, re-introduced the antisemitic and homophobic rhetoric utilizing both World War II and the 1968 anti-Zionist campaigns of the Polish state as an inspiration. More recently, after the fall of socialism, while the antisemitic discourses have been slowly recognized as unacceptable in public space, homophobia reemerged as a tolerable form of hate speech. Depiction of gays as the embodiment of immorality and perversion became a “safer” form of a hate speech and the channel for both homophobic and anti-Semitic discourses. Irena describes it as follows:

If we look at the (current) nationalistic-radical-Catholic and the (pre war) National Democracy discourses, there is a replacement right there (...) I think that openly anti-Semitic articles are seen as hate speech, there is a tabooization of the Anti-semitism in Poland: lack of social, public, even state approval to broadcasting anti-Semitic content, it is not fully acceptable anymore. And you know for the All Polish Youth activists, it could be a problem for their career... not for all of them but for some... But with homophobia it is not the case. It is a certain kind of hate speech that allows polarizing the world according to the opposition between, a healthy nation and a contagious perversion. This discourse that was once anti-Semitic and is now homophobic. The preparation of such a

word is possible because public homophobia is out there, it is not seen dangerous, threatening. It is a safe form of hate speech, safer than antisemitism, with which there is a problem, because there are accusations right away of antisemitism, and because Poles are not anti-Semites, they shouldn't say anti-Semitic statements... because the right wing is saying, as we all know, that there is no antisemitism in Poland, that Anti-semitism is an imagined by Jews, there is no anti-Semitism here, Poles are not anti-Semites. So the (right wing) can no longer, at the same time, say something anti-Semitic. And it is different with homophobia because homophobia is such as „national treasure“... and it is a very convenient form of hate speech (r23)

Progressive social justice movements in Poland: feminists, liberals, and socialists have been using liberal language of equality and tolerance to fight reemergence of nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and homophobia. Strategies based on tolerance failed partially because, as homophobia and Anti-Semitism resonate as inherently “Polish”, discourses of equality and tolerance has been identified and ridiculed by media and public opinion as “foreign”. More recently however, progressive activist and feminists initiated an attempt to utilize the grand narrative of Polishness to gain support for their cause. The anti-homophobic groups and feminists groups have begun to re-appropriate the metaphor of Jewish-gay experience to envision the perils of homophobia, particularly by recalling the experience of the Holocaust and March 1968. These newly emerging discourses aim at the re-conceptualization of the ‘other’ as ‘one of us’ through the idea of solidarity with and care for the most vulnerable social groups. Ewa argues:

What it is all about is that when you are on tv or on the radio, and you are there for a feminist cause. Your status as a person who is discriminated against is very unclear here. You are always suspected of making it all up. But when it comes to Anti-Semitism, it is known that it exists. There are different approaches to it, but the fact that it ?? This?? exists is certain. It is a social problem, and everybody knows that it is not just made up. So when you go to talk about feminism and you start comparing sexism and antisemitism or antisemitism and homophobia, then you legitimize a problem. You legitimize a problem, by showing the analogy. You say, here you are, it is the same, and "You, cannot deny that antisemitism exists, do you (r25)

Building upon the changing attitude of the Polish public towards Jews, many feminist and gay and lesbian rights activists aim to reposition minorities from the margins to the center of the public discourse by emphasizing recognition of their rights as fair, ethical and constituting the core of newly re-established tradition of Polish democracy. To refuse minorities the right to be part of Polish culture, they argue, is to deny the Polish national identity and culture to which they claim tolerance and hospitality are crucial.

This reappropriation and bringing together of questions of sexuality and ethnicity some older feminists identify as part of the „new wave of feminism“ to which „discourse of difference“ is central. Beata sees the incorporation of the „difference” discourses as representative of the new modality of the Polish feminist movement:

It is a 3rd wave, and the 3rd wave is a feminism of differences. I think it started much earlier, although there was not much talk about lesbians in the women movement for a long time. Then it started to be talked about, but very lightly, and right now, the emancipation movement of gays and lesbians took off for good. In a way this discussion has been forced and in between there was a debate about a women, jewish women, what does it mean to be a Jew or Roma(r27)

Drawing the analogy between sexism, racism, and homophobia not only aims as legitimizing gay rights activism as a continuation of feminism. It also strives to re-inscribe both feminist and gays and lesbian rights mobilisations into the narrative of the struggle against foreign (and) authoritarian regimes: the tradition which comes back to pre-war, national independence mobilization and post-war Solidarity times. Finally it allows a re-rooting of the feminist struggle, and grounding it in the broader tradition of fighting anti-Semitism in the 1930s, 1960s, and 1990s in Poland. Beata:

It is the same thing that with the Jews and anti-Semitism before, it is obvious to me that at certain point the scale of anti-Semitism was so big, that everybody who stood up by their side, said „we are all Jews“. I think that there is a similar situation now that we all have to say, „we are all gays and lesbian, homosexuals“ (r11)

Moreover addressing questions about Polish anti-Semitism and homophobia in the media became a growing strategy of reclaiming ownership of national identity. In terms of politics, the symbolic re-location of the positionality of minorities from subalterns to the center of the public debates implies a reclaiming of public space, arguing that the presence of the so-called minorities is inherent in Polish history, they are native, not foreign to Polish culture and public space. This strategy thus calls for re-claiming the ownership of the Polish culture, its proponents argue that concept of Poland should no longer be given up for ultra conservatives. “Taking back” the national discourses allow verbalizing emotional attachments to some aspects of the Polish culture (tolerance, hospitality) and willingness to transform others (hostility, conservatism). In one of her recent interviews Agnieszka Graff, a feminist and writer states:

I want to change Poland. We are from here and we can no longer tolerate the stereotype that everything here is conservative (Graff 2008).

Transforming the Polish public sphere means stretching its symbolic and political boundaries by including the marginal, subaltern peoples: Jews, sexual minorities, Roma and immigrants, into the public discourses. The project of taking back a culture constitutes the potential for re-shaping the Polish public sphere and (re)introducing questions of race, class, and sexuality into the political debate. It marks the shifts of the mainstream discourses from inclusion to recognition; allows for the re-construction of the intersectional feminist subjectivities (such as Jewish/lesbian/Polish); and prompts the critique of the hegemonic feminist discourses of “identity politics”. Many thus see it as a remedy for Polish feminism’s identity struggles. In her article “Woman and the Other”, published around the same time in March 2008, Agnieszka Graff argued that reclaiming Polishness can be a legitimate strategy to locate Polish feminism between socialism, liberalism, legacies of Marxism, and western feminist thought:

We shouldn’t leave the right to define Polishness to National Democrats, as much as we shouldn’t give up our right to define “liberalism” to free market economy fundamentalists. I feel like constant reference to the “civilized world” and “Union’s standards” is a dead end. It feels like minorities and women live in their own country as guests. Accepting the role limited to being an opponents of the nationalistic right, we became hostages of the right cause, a shadow of the modern left. But our claims are of importance for the large groups of citizens; they should be clearly articulated, and become an equal part of the Polish public debate (Graff, 2008)

Finally this intersection of Jewish, sexual, and gender identity as a site of struggle for social justice in Poland has proved to be a successful tool to gain media visibility not only

in Poland but also transnationally. On May 3rd 2006, the New York Times has published an article devoted to the scandal, which involved one of the most publicly recognized Polish feminists, Kazia Szczuka³⁰. The newspaper rightly noticed that the post-communist past of Poland was at stake in the controversy where feminists represent the progressive, pro-western public in the country, and Catholics and conservatives represent backward, and anti-European tendencies³¹. As she is Jewish feminist, and a gay and lesbian activist, the ways Szczuka was treated by the Polish public, indicated, according to the NYT the condition of Polish public sphere. The case illustrated how the nationalism and the question of sexuality raised by feminism intersect. NYT represented the situation as follows

Szczuka is also an activist for gay rights, while President Kaczynski is a political figure who, as mayor of Warsaw last year, gained notoriety throughout liberal circles in Europe when he banned the city's annual gay pride parade. On the other side is Radio Maryja, which for many Polish analysts represents the still deeply religious Poland that feels threatened by creeping secularism. The Rev. Tadeusz Rydzyk, a conservative, populist priest who actively supported the Kaczynski brothers during last year's election

³⁰ A couple of days later, on the TV show, Szczuka was making fun of one of the host of Radio Maryja, a radical Catholic radio-station in Poland. It later occurred that the subject of Szczuka's comments, was disabled. Szczuka apologized, but the National Media Council had considered banning her appearances on public TV. The New York Times editors rightly identify the scandal as situated at the most tense intersection of the Polish public debate in which Catholic and anti-Semitic discourses interact with the progressive, secular narratives.

³¹ Richard Bernstein of the New York Times wrote: "What many people believe to be at issue are the deep divisions that have appeared in Polish life since the end of Soviet-enforced Communist dictatorship some 16 years ago. Ms. Szczuka's views reflect a secular, Western-oriented Poland that is in the European Union and subscribes to what have become the standard European democratic and liberal values" (Bernstein, 2006) The newspaper also reminds us that the new conservative governing party, Law and Justice, clearly sides more with the religious and traditional values generally represented by Radio Maryja than with people like Ms. Szczuka, who see Radio Maryja as an intolerant throwback to an unwelcome past (...) Ms. Szczuka, who is well known in Poland as a feminist, an active supporter of gay rights, and an opponent of Law and Justice, whose leading figures are President Kaczynski and his twin brother, the party chairman, Jaroslaw Kaczynski. Nobody here is saying the scandal indicates a resurgence of the old Polish demon of anti-Semitism, which is against the law here and which many people, including opponents of the Kaczynski twins, believe has never been at lower levels in this country than it is now" (Bernstein, 2006)

campaign, founded the station about 16 years ago. From time to time, the station has taken on a nasty edge, in the form of callers on talk shows or commentators who have expressed the not-quite-disappeared caricatures of Jews that were once deeply embedded in the Polish culture. As reported in the daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Mr. Michalkiewicz, the Radio Maryja commentator, spoke on air of "the men from Judea" who "are trying to surprise us from behind." He said the World Jewish Congress was demanding \$60 billion in compensation for Jewish property lost during World War II, calling the organization "a main firm in the Holocaust industry." (NYT May 3rd, 2006).

One particularly haunting line in the New York Times article and important from the perspective of this chapter is a quotation from Szczuka saying:

"There was a scandal because they hate me," Ms. Szczuka said, referring to the Radio Maryja listeners who reportedly demanded that the government take action against her.

"They hate me because I'm a feminist, I'm Jewish — mostly because I'm a feminist," she said (Bernstein 2006)³²

³² More recently, at the European level, the struggle between neo-conservatism represented by Polish Catholic Church and progressive activists, Czech artists David Cerny as a core of Polish identity in Europe. Cerny's ironic representation has of course struck a critique but at the same pointed to the ambivalence of the Polish nationalism, sexuality, Catholicism debate: in his work Catholic priest can be at the same time seen as trying to take away and/or put down the rainbow flag (see photo 5).



However the strategy of putting together the Jewish and non-heteronormative identities in reference to national identity and patriotism is also highly controversial and widely criticized within the feminist movement itself. Wanda Nowicka argued for instance that such a strategy does not engage the question of ethnic differences present in Poland, and makes the conceptualization of “race” even harder:

When we look a little more broadly it is hard to recognize such vision as modern (...) This conception, maybe unconsciously, is designed to “fit” modern Poles who are those born of Poles in Poland, who spend most of their time in Poland and have no identity issues. It is hard for me to see how it relates to the thousand of people who are now living in Poland; Iraqis, who are here for the last 20 years, Ukrainian women, living in Poland for the last 15 years or Vietnamese. Patriotism as category leaves these people behind, even if they hold Polish citizenship, pay taxes, they are always a subaltern of this country’s identities debates (bezjaj.pl)

Along the same lines, in reference to the sexual minorities Joanna Mizielińska reminded us that “flirting with the mainstream” political culture, the one that represents the legacy of oppression and discrimination often requires certain sacrifices (Mizielińska 2008). Emancipation discourses that are based on assimilation and the claim to patriotism require the thorough eradication of “difference” while they do not assure full incorporation of various groups into the society’s membrane. Historically, as J.T Gross argued in his book *Fear* also in case of Jews, the attempt to inscribe an ethnic identity into Polishness not only required a conversion to Catholicism and rejection of cultural difference, but as the Second World War and post-war pogroms indicated, did not contribute to the full recognition of Jews as Poles (Gross 2006). Moreover while based on the emphasis of sameness, the assimilation discourses contribute to the representation of

difference as shameful and reaffirm the ideal of the homogenous society (Mizielińska 2008).

Some feminists argue that this kind of analogies make talking about the positionality of women and Jews in the Polish historical narrative as 'others' representing the 'difference' impossible as they leave behind the questions of how the alternative trajectories have been formed, how they intersected and how their recognition could transform the norms and values of the Polish public discourse (Habermas 1992). Moreover, equating the experience of sexual minorities with those of Polish Jews oversimplifies the genealogy and trajectory of each of these groups and their relation with the Polishness. On a personal level, this might result in the substitution of one identity over another and lead to the omission of the differences between various axes of one's identity. Ewa, a feminist anthropologist and the member of a feminist rap band argues that clustering feminist and Jewish identities might result in the production of a "universal victim" of the Polish national narrative, the figure that would be insensitive to the various forms of agency exercised by both Jews and women throughout the history :

You don't see the differences between the two anymore... all you can see is that analogy. (...) I'm sceptical. I think it can be used to emphasize that one is a victim. It is a stigma of the victim, and then guilt trip, cause if you say you are Jewish, that means you are untouchable, you carry the whole cruelty of the world on your back. With that you shut everybody's mouths. You are Jewish so now we all have to shut up (r21)

At the collective level, too Ewa argues, the sensitivity to the differences by and between sexual minorities and Jews in Poland can be overlooked:

For me what is very important, when it comes to anti-Semitism in Poland, is history, the whole context ,, pre-war Poland, nationalistic tradition in Poland. I agree that these two

things are built upon similar motifs, hostility etc. but I just think that putting it all together results in missing the context, you miss the whole history of the phenomenon,, and these histories are very different. (r21)

One may argue that there are differences between the relationship in which sexual and ethnic identities are to the Polish national identity as well as feminist identities. Ewa again questions putting together anti-Semitic and homophobic discourses:

It irritates me a little. I don't like such comparisons, particularly homophobia and anti-Semitism. I have a feeling that they oversimplify both. These comparisons result in the loss of many very significant differences. When you overemphasize commonalities you erase differences, to prove that you are right. And then you don't see the difference anymore; all you can see is this comparison. (...) to me in a way is a move backwards in the process of objectifying feminism (r21).

First of all, while lesbian identities have been articulated within feminism, the debate over "race" and "ethnicity" has yet to come. Polish feminism has never experienced wave of homophobia that, some claimed was the a part of the experience of the Second wave feminist movement in the US (Brown). Since late 1980 in Poland lesbians were both active feminists and as lesbian activists cooperated with feminist organizations. Starting from pre-Beijing preparation of the shadow reports throughout 1990s feminist and lesbians cooperated in many way and around number of issues. However, many lesbian feminists in Poland argue that the "mainstream" feminism (NGOs feminism as well as feminists active in mainstream media) in Poland, tend to represents Polish women as "de facto" straight which results with lesbians being positioned as the „other". Such representation leads to the marginalization of the lesbian women's issues and the exclusion of the question of sexuality from the debate on feminist identity and genealogy.

At the same time the question of lesbianism also does not come across as important in the identity debate over homosexuality, predominantly devoted to the gay men.

Alternatively, after the fall of communism and particularly after the 1999 publication of Gross's book, *Neighbors*, in Poland, the question of the location of Jews within Polish culture and history has been widely debated³³ (Gross 2001). This debate intersected with earlier discussions within the community of Polish Jews about the role of religion, gender, and tradition. The question of Jewish women's identity, however, has rarely been raised as important to feminist identity in Poland. Irena argues that even though Polish feminists have been sensitive to issues other than "gender" forms and oppression' and most of them can „decode anti-Semitic discourse right away [because] we know how to unravel discriminatory positions" (r23) the debate over a cultural, or ethnic identity is not yet there. While it is often assumed that Polish feminism "comes naturally to the Jewish women" and that the Jews and feminists are „two communities built on the same premises", the question of the status of the various cultural, and "ethnic" identities very rarely asked. Irena argues:

I think that establishing the fact that we feminists are also Jewesses and we would like to tell you feminists, and Polish women about Jewish tradition, would be very precious.

There was some of it at the "Polka" exhibit (the exhibit that took place at Warsaw's Museum of Modern Art and which was an comprehensive overview of the positionality of women in Polish culture), there prof. Janion and Anna Zawadowska, included Jewish subject as obvious. But it is not enough... I feel like if we (Jewish women M.G) would propose it (to feminists M.G.), it would be welcomed...(r23)

³³ The book was published in the US in 2001.

In the debate over nationality, culture, and sexuality the question of to what extent Polish feminism conforms to the pre-existing idea of the Polish community and its ethnic and sexual homogeneity in which the Polish, Catholic, and heterosexual contract is still the norm, are the biggest challenges³⁴. While Graff and others propose the transformation of the Polish political culture by turning into its own symbols and legacies, they aim to re-root feminism in the nation. Nowicka and Mizielińska on the other hand seem to engage more with globally circulating discourses of differences. Both strategies to certain extent build upon the concept of the stranger. Shane Phelan Mizielińska argues that the transformation of the deepest levels of the political culture is the precondition for the successful implementation of full citizenship for “strangers” (Mizielińska 2007). The visibility and access to the symbolic narratives that constitute the specificity of each culture represents a trajectory from the positionality of certain subaltern subjects as they move to the center, the transformation from being “others” to become “us.”

***Homo-niewiadomo*³⁵. Queers, Feminists and sexual politics**

The location of lesbians within both Polish feminist genealogy and the broader narrative of Polishness is still unknown. In her article “Traces of the lesbian movement” Anna Gruszczynska rightly notes that:

To talk about the lesbian movement in Poland is really to talk about traces of non-existence, about comprehending the history written with transparent ink on white paper, about never described space (Gruszczynska 1999).

³⁴ (Finally, it is about the role of media in the conceptualization of these identities. Strangers and the nation constructing the border identity and new citizenship)

³⁵ “homo- niewiadomo” (direct translation “homo-the-unknown”) in Poland is a the expression referring to the ambivalent, uncanny character of gay sexuality. .

Although in many respects, Polish feminism from the early 1990s considered the issues of lesbians as one of the issues important to women (see the alternative report for Beijing), lesbian feminists have found themselves trapped between loyalty to the gay and lesbian movement and loyalty to the women's movement. In the opinion of many lesbian feminists, while the Polish women's movement focuses on the "renegotiation of the heterosexual contract," the face of the gay and lesbian movement is still a gay man. The genealogy of the lesbian movement in Poland, is usually traced either within the studies of the occasional woman popping up in between the lines devoted to male homosexuality or through the reconstruction of the subtext of the feminist narrative.

Many blame the subtle silencing experienced by lesbians on the inherently heterosexual character of feminist theory and practice in Poland. Some of my interviewees argued that even within the women's movement, lesbian desire represents a threat to the concept of womanhood promoted in Poland, by straight feminist women. On the other hand, "mainstream" feminist activists and theorists argue that the recognition of lesbian subjectivity as a part of the feminist agenda has been a part of trajectory of Polish emancipation discourses. For instance, one of the feminist writers admits that she intentionally excluded lesbians from her book and argues that at the time the book was written she couldn't find a proper language to talk about the sexual difference within feminism (Graff 2008). Many feminists active in the 1990s concur and argued that "to talk or not to talk" about their own non-heterosexual identity often constituted a strategic dilemma in the context of their connectivity with a broader female audience. Beata, an activist who organized first feminist conferences in Krakow, remembers:

At one of our meetings] someone said: „Dear ladies we cannot talk about lesbians, as being a feminist itself is hard, and introducing myself as feminist is hard, and if we start saying about anything about lesbians, it will be a burden and it will be even harder for us. Gave it up with lesbians!.” And then there was silence. Then I remember I said that we absolutely shouldn’t leave it alone, because it is very important, and that those lesbians are women, women are lesbians, and we are all Polish lesbians, and we should stand up for the excluded. It maybe was particularly easy for me [to say that] but, for a long time in*** there was no space to lesbian actions, maybe only like 10% (r27)

As Gruszczyńska argues, and many of my respondents concur for some of the lesbians active in the early 1990s women’s movement “invisibility” became a survival strategy:

As a short run strategy “invisibility” gives a relief from the problems related to discrimination. On the other hand it sets up a ban for talking about eventual lesbian desire (Gruszczyńska 1999).

Lesbian feminists according ka often times choose to avoid questions about their sexual orientation by turning into “all women’s issues” which in Polish case meant majority of times “all straight women’s issues”. This “strategic essentialism” allowed survival but it also constituted a tremendous challenge for individual identities of lesbians active in the movement. They were fighting for women’s rights but they couldn’t fight for their own rights. Silencing of lesbians’ issues became a reason why some younger feminists.

Monika argues:

(...) We had a feeling that even though the subject is not silenced, there was no OSKa bulletin devoted to it for instance. Apparently there was no exclusion, you could function and be out, but it was not a subject of the debate, in OSKa, for instance there were no meeting devoted to it, no bulletin, nothing. (r1)

Since the late 1990s there has been undeniable progress in the advancing of lesbian rights; both in terms of making the question of sexual minorities part of Polish public space, and within the feminist community itself. In his “Subjective and Objective *queer* Politics” Jacek Kochanowski proposes to see the trajectory of the Polish gay and lesbian movement through the lenses of three stages (Kochanowski 2008). First, between 1989-2001, which was the phase of the “internal collective queer politics”. The activities of the organizations during this stage focused on counseling and other service activities, and gay and lesbian organizations were established. The second stage, between 2001-2003, was the phase of the “external, collective, subjective queer politics” according to Kochanowski, the movement consolidated. The third stage of the movement’s development, between 2003-2005,¹ Kochanowski identifies as a period of “scattered, individual, *queer* politics”. During this last phase, internal conflicts within the gay and lesbian movement made a coherent collective action impossible (Kochanowski 2008).

The trajectory of the queer movement in Poland has been intersecting with the arrival of the globally circulating conceptualizations of gay and lesbian identity, an equal rights discourse, and queer theory and practice. Identity politics, “equal rights”, and the assimilation model have been used as a major way to introduce the issues of sexual minorities to the general public. Liberal and leftist politicians, feminists, and some gay and lesbian activists have utilized often times oversimplified versions of the “equal rights” narrative to make issues of sexual minorities visible and comprehensive for the broader public. The emergence of the “normalization” discourses also intersected with both Polish accession to the EU: many activist and politicians argued that the level of Polish tolerance, represented the level of europeization of Poles. Given Polish ambition

to “catch up” with the West this strategy has proved to be successful in increasing positive attitudes towards sexual minorities in some groups: mostly young people and media representatives.

One of the crucial objective of the “equality” driven strategies of the early 2000s was to increase the visibility of gay and lesbians in Polish public space. The 2003 “Let them see US” campaign, the biggest recognition campaign to date in Poland, utilized 300 billboards, to familiarize Polish public opinion across the country with the non-heterosexual couples. The billboards represented gay and lesbians couples of various age. This campaign, that has been sponsored by the EU through the office of Plenipotentiary of Equal Treatment of Women and Men uses the “equality”, “sameness” and “normalcy” rhetoric to introduce “sexual minorities” publicly. The creators of the project describe its premises as follows:

The author of the photos wanted them to be similar to each other, monotonous even, so the spectators who will watch all 30 of them will be almost bored, and think that they are like the hundreds of people *he* sees on the street daily- that gay and lesbians are not the sensation. If the homosexuals look normal, like average, they are as normal as, he the spectator is (nichanaszobacza.org.pl.)

In the interview with “Polityka” an influential and left leaning Polish weekly, the authors of the campaign argued:

Our goal was to show homosexuals as regular people. Just couples holding hand. Neither perverts nor queers. Not discriminated, oppressed. Neither the ones from the Gay Parades, nor the one’s who wear women’s clothes, not butch, as people may imagine them, but a regular [person] as a neighbor from your block, salesman in the bodega; as everyone” (Pietkiewicz 2002)

The author of the interview concurred in her commentary:

Our homosexuals are very *regular* people: in love monogamously - they have common houses, they have cats. They write poems for each other” (Pietkiewicz 2002)

She cited one of the project participants who stated:

Let them see that the lesbian is not a woman who looks like a man, but a *normal* girl
(Pietkiewicz 2002)

Normalization discourses for which the “Let them see Us” campaign was a starting point have become particularly popular after 2005. After that year a radical right regime took over the power and started its term with spectacular actions against the gay and lesbian community. While the widely unpopular right wing’s rhetoric was directed mostly against the sexual minorities, the defense of the latter has become a site through which the general public could voice its refusal of the ruling party’s politics. In an unfriendly political environment, equality parades became a litmus test of Polish democracy. The massive support and attendance of the gay and lesbian Equality Marches in Warsaw and other cities in 2005 and 2006 symbolized the radical rejection of the government, rather than the support of “sexual difference” and thus have been an instance of agency as resistance (Dissenyake 1996)

One instance of the mainstreaming of the sexual minorities issue is the reaction of intellectual elites and mainstream media to the ban of the Equality March in Poznań. In early 2005, Poznań’s president announced that the march, which had been organized annually since 2000, was illegal as it constituted a threat to public safety. The organizers decided to demonstrate anyway and neoconservative groups attacked them. As the police refused to secure the protection of an “illegal” demonstration, several people were beaten

and some arrested. A few days later, feminists along with gay and lesbian activists organized a solidarity event with Poznań's demonstrators in Warsaw. The mainstream politicians and media representatives attended massively the "Democracy Reactivation". They stepped up to defend the citizens' rights in the newly established democracy and expressed their solidarity with "the most vulnerable" citizens. Many of them, utilized the solidarity rhetoric to symbolically inscribe the gay and lesbian struggles into the earlier struggles for democracy - such as the Solidarity movement. Feminists, mainstream media journalists and some liberal politicians attempted to draw a link between fighting the authoritarian state under communism and the ultraconservative state in 2000s "free" Poland. The issue of the march has thus been framed as a defense of the values, of liberalism, and of liberal democracy, to include liberties such as the freedom of speech and the freedom of gathering rather than issues of one particular group. Many of the speakers tend to omit the merit of the debate that is the question of the presence of the (sexual) difference in the public discourse and public space. Feminists, gays and lesbians were not alone in public anymore, the question of women's and sexual minorities' rights became a question of democracy:

And it is pretty obvious to me. It is a matter of democracy, it is not a matter of sexual minorities' rights, but mainly about the model of democracy, about the country that we live in, and democracy for our children as well (...) (r16)

One of the consequences of repositioning the sexual minorities rights from margins to the center of the public debate was the significant decreases of the level of aggression and hate speech directed towards feminists and sexual minorities, which translated into the greater physical safety of the individuals.

As the struggle for “equal treatment” of same sex couples, gained a lot of public support some feminist activists started to see it as a template for feminist organizing. They wondered how the gay and lesbian movement managed to obtain not only the EU funding but also the support of mainstream liberal elites in Poland. Beata argued:

There is a lot of reflection on how the gay and lesbian movement is really revolutionary.

They are ahead of feminism, and they have spirit; and we (feminists) don't have that.

Why? Because we were fighting for the last 10 years. (r12)

For her, lesbian struggles became an inspiration:

I myself moved in that direction, when I co-organized the equality march in Poznan, and then queer theory seemed to me more inspiring (then feminist theories). So in a way it is a parallel (feminism and lesbianism). On the one hand there is politics, on the other theory (r12).

Some feminists: scholars and activists, however, have raised doubts about the actual value of such a transformation. They asked to what extent an effort to inscribe gay and lesbian rights into the existing democracy will result in “real” recognition of their difference within the public sphere. For some activists, also those within the gay and lesbian community, it became obvious that the strategy of the appropriation of gays and lesbians into the existing mainstream model of the public sphere will eventually haunt the movement. First misgivings of the “patriotism” model of the gay and lesbian movement have surfaced already in April 2005. The national mourning that followed the death of Pope John Paul 2nd, lasted over a month in Poland and had coincide with the yearly Equality Parade in Cracow. As some of the gay and lesbian rights activists decided to cancel the march “out of respect for the national loss” others decided to proceed with the

demonstration. They argued that pope's death did not contradict with the message of tolerance sent by the movement:

Some of us decided that we are mourning the pope, and we shouldn't do terrible things like having a March of Tolerance 3 weeks after pope's death (...) But we here decided that it is nothing terrible, and we all need it; a breath of fresh air. And we were fighting a couple of fronts at the same time. There was a coalition between green party, EFKA and the gay and lesbian movement, and only some people supported it, others felt like it is a work against unity. There was problem with the march's slogan [as] it occurred that the slogan „different but equal“ worked only for the abroad, here we couldn't explain to straights the different- equal thing, the community wasn't ready for it (r12).

Similarly, while the growth of the sexual minorities' rights discourse became an inspiration for the feminist movement, a certain form of “identity politics” that became a subtext of that progression, had become a challenge for lesbian feminist activists within the feminist movement and disappointed those who expected the debate over the “difference” to be the result of such a coalition. Many lesbian feminists argued that although feminists joined the lesbians struggle very strongly, they have never recognized the lesbian struggle as their own, or as women's struggle. Homophobia, far from many feminist activist minds, had, according to many lesbian activists, been a fact within even most “progressive” feminist groups. Iwona argued:

I think it is part of a deal- some people think that we should take small steps, that we have to fight for one thing first and then another. But I don't know, I think feminist movement is homophobic, although there are various types of homophobia. Rather I would say there is an attempt to set a hierarchy. And then we have a question if Polish feminism is **heterosexual**. In my opinion it is, and as such it has certain goals... Still the fight over the sexual minorities, meaning lesbian rights is on a margin of feminism. I have a feeling

that feminists avoid these subjects. And it is not that lesbians exclude themselves, it is simply when I say mainstream, what do mainstream feminists do, and I mean like well know, mainstream feminists, they do not take care of sexual minorities (r32)

Symptomatic of that, for her, was a meeting she participated in a couple of years ago:

I had these discussions on feminism and it was significant to me. There were two meetings of Women's Alliance: On women and power, and , women and politics. I remember around that time, there was a problem with the March of Tolerance in Kraków; many lesbians went to Kraków and they didn't come to the meeting. I said we have to talk about it no matter how many lesbians are present; we have to talk about lesbians and feminism. I heard that on one hand yes but on the other they should come and talk about it. I say ok, but lesbianism is one of the feminists topics right? I heard yes, but they have to lay it down themselves. Ok, but we don't wait for prostitutes to come, and said in their own voice. We don't wait for battered woman to talk about violence. Then why are we waiting for lesbians to come and talk in their own voice? (r32)

The fact that many feminist leaders avoid the debate over the status of lesbians in the movement and moreover the sexuality debate, makes it impossible to incorporate lesbian issues as women's issues into the movement's agenda. Even though feminism has theoretically been very much devoted to the fight for sexual minorities' rights, still many non-heterosexual women felt that within the feminist community "lesbians" are the "other women". Again Iwona argues:

In a certain way feminists and lesbians united, also through the organization of Manifa. On the other hand this coalition is it is debatable, we still have two separate organizations Lesbian Agreement and Women's Agreement. And it does sound weird when it is said that Women Agreement and Lesbian Agreement, organize Manifa, on other hand it is a common battleground. And when it comes to conflict it is about the level of radicalism. I

remember when there was Manifa and Drag kings were supposed to perform, some lesbian groups backed up. So in Poland there is a fear of certain radical actions (...) it shows in my opinion how the coalition between feminism and lesbianism is done. But lesbianism is not part of feminism. Do you understand? I can see it. There is a lot good will, to cooperate but feminism is heterosexual. And that's why there are problems. And that's why if there is a mainstream, the mainstream will be heterosexual. In Poland we try to exercise the coalition approach, for instance at the last year Manifa, Women's Agreement and Lesbian Agreement, treated these two as equal (...) but on the other hand in the media feminists talk only about what can be a catch for a media, and these kind of action will not have such media reflex (r32)

For mainstream feminism, reaching out to the broader public became a major political goal. It however required both subscribing to the heterosexual representation of *Polish woman* and holding off the discussion of the sexual aspect of equal rights. Bringing “difference” into the heart of the feminist debate became virtually impossible in the model that strived to fit into the national narrative.

Moreover within the “equal rights” narrative the recognition of differences within the *queer* community has become difficult. The normalization model that demands “equal rights” for the “normal” gay and lesbian citizens, constructed the certain rhetoric figure of the homosexual person that is “like” a heterosexual person. It thus represents a particular instance of “identity politics”, that does not allow to challenge the binaries of sexual identities and within which questions of transgender, transsexual subjects was merely possible similarly to the debates about sexism within the lesbian community and lesbian motherhood.

Joanna Mizielińska, the author of the book *The Body, Gender and Sexuality* argues that what has not been yet articulated within the Polish feminist lesbian debate is the status of sexuality itself (Mizielińska 2008b). “Sexual” aspect of the lesbian identity that has been far removed from any “rights” debate according to Mizielińska is really what lies in the center of the lesbian/feminist tensions. In addition the translation of the “identity politics” discourses circulating globally into the Polish context, goes hand in hand with softening the queer discourse and the removal of the original “sexual” content from the *queer* struggles. Finally, the removal of the sexuality part of the gay and lesbian struggle and the appropriation of the “identity politics” model, results in a peculiar reception of the *queer* theory and politics in Poland. As it is difficult to translate, *queer* is often time used as a “cover up”. Using the foreign sounding word, with which many are still not familiar gives an impression that there is nothing dangerous about the course/conference/ event as “gays”, “lesbian” and “sexuality” are replaced by it (Mizielińska 2008b).

In Poland, Mizielińska argues most of the pro-gay and lesbian arguments are constructed around the idea of commonality and sameness. In the “equality” centered emancipation discourses these are our similarities not differences that make us deserving of equal rights. Within the “Let them see Us” campaign for instance, non-heterosexual subjects have been presented in the context recognized as “normal” but characteristic “monogamous”, “heterosexual” couples. The possibility to describe the “sexual minority” within the paradigm of “human rights” required emphasizing similarities and demanded making *queers* “human” aka proof their sexual decency (Mizielińska 2008b). Many argue that such discourses make the debate over the non-heteronormative sexuality practically

impossible. As they maintain the binary understanding of sexuality as representing one of the two options - gay or straight, conform to the fixed, pre-existing sexual identity and often argue the gays and lesbians “are born” as such, hence they represent the “identity politics” model of emancipation. As it promotes the idea of the fixed sexual identities such model makes more profound critique of sexuality, for instance a compulsory heterosexuality, impossible

While using *queer* as a cover up for the gay and lesbian studies can be seen as a subversive strategy that allows introduction of the controversial topics into the academe, the “strategic silencing” of the sexuality related themes of the queer theory and “strategic essentialism” represents sexuality leads to the confirmation of predefined “either- or” situation significantly. It thus results in the exclusion of the *queer* critiques of the identity model, and the subversive narratives that *queer* theory can carry, including the critique of state institutions such as marriage based on the patriarchal traditional and compulsory heterosexuality. Moreover it equates non heteronormative sexuality with gay and lesbian sexuality and does not allow the exposure of the ways in which compulsive heterosexuality impacts the lives of other *queer subjects* such as transgender, transsexual and inter-sexual subjects but also untraditional heterosexuals - single mothers, interracial couples and other non traditional family constellation (Cohen 1997). Subversive queerness that challenges the “identity politics” based model of emancipation , in such defined identity politics, is equally threatening to gay and lesbian rights activists as it is to the mainstream political culture.

Mizielińska argues that the over association of *queerness* with the gay and lesbian struggle leads to the loss of the revolutionary, subversive content of the term and

conforms to the binary constructions of sexuality. Both strategies of using the word *queer*, (mystifying the gay and lesbian topics with the foreign word and equating *queer* with gay and lesbian studies) directed toward achieving and convincing the general public about the “normalcy” of the gay and lesbian couples. They represent sexual identity not only as based on dichotomy hetero-homo but also represent sexuality as stable and natural – as fixed. They thus produce a real *queer* as its own subaltern, those who do not conform to the binary (gay- straight) dichotomy, while often times the proponents of the normalization model, remain hostile and exclusionary towards those who reject the binary conception of sexuality (Mizielińska 2008b). For instance, proponents of the normalization approach often see “coming out” as successful strategy to make sexual minorities visible (Laszuk 2005). One of my interviewees, a literary critic and the author of a book on queer theory, was approached by a gay and lesbian magazine, and asked to be featured. The magazine has a periodical column in which prominent individuals from the community “come out” as gay and or lesbians. My friend was asked to do so as well. When she refused, arguing that first her sexuality is her personal issue and second that she does not really conform to the label “lesbian” the editors felt offended and accused her of not supporting sexual minorities rights in Poland.

In her book, Mizielińska formulates a need to introduce more radical sexual politics discourses into the conversation about sexual minorities in Poland. More precisely she calls for an incorporation of the “sexuality” discourses into this conversation. Mizielińska argues that the simple transplantation of western concepts into the Polish context hardly ever work, while various locations require different operational tools and different strategies. Neither the “identity politics” approach nor the softened

version of *queer politics* work in the Polish context, partially because internationally circulating discourses on sexuality do not take into account the specificity of the Polish context (Mizielińska 2008b). In Poland, Mizielińska is convinced we need to develop our own tools that allow for the conceptualization of sexual difference (Mizielińska 2008). Beata Kowalska, an anthropologist from Krakow concurs and argues that those receptions of *queer* theory and practice that take on the antiestablishment message have the most subversive potential in Poland. They can they resonate with the ecological movements of the late 1980s such as Peace and Freedom and the art-politic-performance based formation Orange Alternative³⁶. Both of these formations built upon the ambivalence of the identities- particularly Orange Alternative use “gender” disguise to send its anti-mainstream message- and might be good sources for the *queer* identities legacies in Poland. The play on strangeness that all those movements took on in the past can be a strategic tool to inscribe *queerness* into the Polish cultural politics. Proposing a conceptualization of *queerness* as strangeness one cannot forget that historically the most powerful representation of the stranger, and outsider within is without a doubt the figure of the Polish Jews.

Between race, culture and religion: Jewish feminists’ identity

³⁶ Orange Alternative (Pomarańczowa Alternatywa) was an underground movement established in Wrocław by Waldemar Fydrych 1980s. Main idea behind this initiative was to attract various social groups to an alternative and peaceful forms of political protest. Orange Alternative was known for its uses of absurd, irony and ability to invade the public space peacefully. Initially it painted ridiculous graffiti of dwarves on paint spots covering up anti-communist slogans on city walls. Afterwards, beginning with 1985 through 1990, it organized a series of more than sixty happenings in several Polish cities, including Wrocław, Warsaw, Łódź, Lublin and Tomaszów Mazowiecki.

Rejecting the religious affiliation, yet experiencing her Jewishness as significant to her feminism, Irena found it quite hard to describe her identity. At first she vigorously rejected, the „ethnicity“ of Jewishness, claiming instead cultural identity:

Oh no, it is really hard for me to talk about ethnic (identity). I would rather say: cultural. For people who are part of this minority here, Jewish minority, and live the life of this community, it is a secular path (...) For me it is not an essential identity, in my case it is rather a cultural narrative, psychoanalytic... Moreover, it makes sense to me as a whole when I tell it to myself as a thing that I can read about in books, when I can get to know my biography in the diaries of women older than me, but with a similar cultural background. I get to know myself that way. This is emotional stuff, emotional climate at home, psychoanalytic symbolism and the war trauma. But it is not essentialist in a way that I have a big nose and say „aj wai“ or anything like that...(r13)

However, later on in the discussion she wondered:

But when I go to the conference to ZIH (Jewish Historical Institute), and there are people who... When you go to feminist meetings it's the same, same types, a lot of lesbians in the case of feminism for example, when you go to the Jewish community, it is true that they have a so called „look“ (wygląd). And all of the sudden you see that this lady looks like your aunt and that lady looks like your grandmother, and the other like your sister. Maybe it is cultural, maybe it is performative, but it is visible. Body language, way of dressing, way of talking, vocabulary, jokes. It exists. It is constructed, but maybe also biological... (r13)

Ewa also sees her Jewish identity through her community and family history, as an experience and narrative not exactly essentialist, yet deterministic:

For me it is something that I feel as a heritage, it is a determinism of the family as you feel the family's history. I have a feeling that it is not a matter of my choice. And I can

approach it in various ways. I can treat it as a curse, or I can think about it as an instance of that fact that I don't have control over everything....My fate is not in my hands. And it is a certain relief, since I realized some things are not under my control, but they are inscribed by my father who is the child of the Holocaust. So this heritage I have in me (...). It is a trauma, which is transmitted through the family... I was raised in the atmosphere of the catastrophe. (r25)

The fact that in Poland, Jewish identity is rarely a religious identity is often a certain relief, it allows for Jewish and feminist identities to co-exists, moreover they are oftentimes seen as complimentary:

The truth is these two communities are similar to each other: they are very close and very narrow circles, communities, societies that live their own live and have their own issues. Feminists are like that as well, and this is very natural. I think this is how it should be; every group has its own vocabulary, its calendar, its events, and its moments in the media. It has its own people who are recognized. It is a proof that we exist and that is it normal. These two communities are built on the same permisses as they are an alternative to the mainstream, and that's why I think there is a lot of sympathy there. (...) I think, I see a lot of understanding and sympathy in the Jewish community to think about the emancipation. Likewise in the feminist community (r23)

This ambiguous positionality that encompasses the centrality of the Jewish culture and identity in the Polish experience and at the same time situates Jews in subalternity within the Polish culture is in many ways a product of a certain path of assimilation of Polish Jews. In the case of Poland, a specific stratification of the pre-and to certain extent post-war society to which the intelligentsia has been crucial, has also had an impact on the ambivalent feminist and Jewish trajectories, the one that connected the experience of Jewishness with the pre-war tradition of Polish secular left talked about in chapter 4.

The Jewish identity of some feminists is also related to a particular spatial position. One of the major features of the Polish Jewish identity is that it does not fit into the diasporic identity model, at least not in the immediate sense. Jewish feminists that I have talked to did not experience exile and immigration within the last two generations of their families. They also have been protected from Anti-Semitism and discrimination but their parents and relatives:

When I was 13, someone drew a hanger with a star of David on my grandmother's door. I was protected from that. Nobody told me about it. (r25)

Neither, nor have I ever been discriminated against. As a woman, of course I was, but in more subtle registers. I know that patriarchy put its mark on me, but my story wasn't drastic. And if it comes to my Jewishness I had not experienced either. I was 2 in 1968 (r23)

Polish Jewish feminists belong to those predominantly assimilated Jewish families that have survived the Holocaust, post-war pogroms and the 1968 wave of forced immigration. However the possibility for the Jewish population to remain in Poland was conditioned by the certain kind of the forced assimilation. Some Jews became communists like Bożena's parents who I have talked about in Chapter One. For others, like Irena's family conversion became a way to fit in into Polish society. The norms of the space in which they decided to stay and within which they were in many regards „native” did not allow for the ambivalence and undecideness. They had to either conform to mainstream Polish culture through converting to Christianity to search for a secular niches: such as Communist Party. The later secular, cultural path of maintaining the Jewish identity has been cherished and was been revitalized after the 1989. Irena argues:

It worked even under socialism, it was weak in 1970s but after 1989, there was a renaissance of the Jewish identity, in such a cultural, not religious sense. There was also a conflict between the religious stream and the cultural stream. Mostly between the wives of those men involved and the head of the Warsaw community (r32).

Multidimensionality of the Jewish identity, as it rests uneasily in-between national, ethnic, cultural, and religious discourses in Poland, is one of the central aspects of the location of Jewish feminists within the women's movement in Poland. Re-born after 1989 "cultural" Jewish identity and the "secular" stream was represented amongst others by women, some of them feminists. Women, strangers to the nation, Soshana Felman and Shana Penn were among the first who in the post-communist Poland were asking the questions about the meaning of the Jewish identity in Poland. Felman, who came to Poland from Israel, argued that in Poland Jewishness has to be thought about in secular terms. Shana Penn, another person, who was interested in the same discussion, as a Jewish feminist, has worked on the histories of women's Solidarity leaders. She took part in the debate about Judaism and discussed to what extent it should be revised from the feminist perspective. Bozena Uminska, Agnieszka Graff, Helena Dartner are among names of women involved in this debate in Poland. After the fall of communism, there has been a brief period of time during which the same leaders of the Jewish communities in Poland argued that religious traditions can be a beacon of Jewish identity in Poland, it did not work for many Jewish women - some of them feminists. Many of them have refused religion for the same reason they were sceptical towards liberalism; it has been foreign to their secular - leftist origins.

The association with the left brought up yet another issue important for the Jewish - feminist identity – specifically, the question of Israel. For Ewa argues:

The questions about Israeli politics is on top of all this, how it is perceived in Poland now, and the ways in which Arab culture and Islam are treated in Poland right now.

Some of my friends are emphasizing being Jews, their Jewish identity and/or descedency, and I wonder what would happen if someone would reveal (*pochwalil sie*) being an Arab or a Muslim. What if you would say that your father is a mull. You know what I mean?

This identity to me always linked to being a victim and with victim's guilt trip. This is the context. And yet in the Jewish culture, women are Jewish religion is awful to women, but we talk about Islam, in that context, not about Judaism... (r23)

For some feminists, not only is their relationship with their Jewish heritage troubled. but they also find it difficult to figure out their positionality *vis a vis* Polish culture and identity. In the context of the US, Lotty Pogrebin argued that far more Jewish women have worked for civil rights, welfare rights - issues that did not necessarily affect their own lives (Pogrebin 1982). In Poland, one of my respondents, has argued that while Jewish women constitute a significant part of the movement, their positionality outside, the "plain" Catholic majority, represents the relation between feminism and the society in general. It is Hania who, as I showed in the first chapter, speculated that the overwhelming presence of the "dark hair", non-Slavic type of women in feminism is not an accident:

We cannot connect to Polish tradition of Catholicism. We are not part of it. We are outside of this tradition. Polish feminists are very differently positioned in their own culture than feminist from say Trinidad. My friend, a feminist activist, before she became one, was an antiracists movement activist. She was part of the creation of the Trinidad sovereign state; she was part of the mainstream. (r2)

In Jewish feminist narratives, an often-contradictory sense of being – at the same time – in the center and in the margins of the national narrative is overwhelming. Irena whose words I have already quoted at the beginning of this chapter, argued against the visible difference of Jewish feminists within the Polish movement:

right now I don't think it is particularly (different). If I would go through all my friends, a lot of them are Jewish, maybe a little more then in average population, but it is not a criterion, for sure (r32)

But later on she added as I quoted before:

I think that establishing the fact that we feminists are also Jewesses and we would like to tell you feminists, and Polish women about Jewish tradition that would be very precious (r32)

Jewish feminists trajectory and experience varies greatly from those of lesbian feminists: they have very different genealogies and occupy distinct locations within the Polish culture. What this two groups have in common is their ambivalent status in Polish feminism: both of lesbians and Jewish women's involvement while crucial to the formation of the collective feminist identities is rarely discussed in its specificity. For feminist collective experience the presence of Jewish and lesbian women is at the same time central and subaltern for the feminist narrative. For Jewish and lesbian feminists on the other hand the layers of identity that come with the national/cultural identity of being a Jewess and being a lesbian intersect with their feminist identity.

Intersectionality, Ambivalence and Hybridity: Ethnic and sexual strangers in Polish feminism

Sometimes trying to get a grasp of these complex identity intersections becomes an issue. The experience of lesbian and Jewish feminists is the most vivid proof of impossibility of

the fixed never changing feminist identity on one hand and the necessity to centralize ambiguity as crucial to identity formation process on the other. Both Jewish and lesbian feminist more often have trouble answering the question of who they are as feminists. Not only is there no clear boundary between Jewish/lesbian/feminist experiences, these axes of identity overlap and intersect with each other. For Jewish women, while the feminism is often already there, the Jewish identity has yet to be figured out. Ewa, who is now in her late 20s and active in a feminist movement for at least 12 years, argues:

I don't know, I wonder about why, I don't get it yet... I was always very sensitive to all discrimination. Partially because my sister taught me some things. She would come home and say that racism is horrible, and then she would say that sexism is horrible (...) My political views are shaped mostly through feminism. The feminist perspective is the one through which I would look at the Israeli politics. With more attention, I will listen to Arab women than the president of Israel. More I will listen to women from Israeli feminist organizations... It is a major perspective for me...(r25)

She claims feminist identity is primal for her:

My political views are shaped mostly through feminism. The feminist perspective is the one through which I would look at the Israeli politics. With more attention, I will listen to Arab women then, the president of Israel. More I will listen to women from Israeli feminist organizations... It is a major perspective for me (...) (r21)

Experience of some lesbian feminist is similar, as many of them travel between various identifications. Monika, describes a shift between feminism and lesbianism:

Yes, I think about myself as a feminist, but as I said before, I just realized... When I was doing the exercise that is called „the pieces of my identity“ (you put 5 pieces of how you feel about where you belong), and I did this exercise many times before, and I had no doubt what I should write down there, which is funny to me now, it was „women“,

„feminists“, „Wen-Do instructors“, „non-governmental organizations“ (...) But recently when I was doing this exercise I didn't put feminists in, which was really surprising for me. I looked at that piece of paper and I saw that it doesn't matter to me, I don't feel I belong to the group of feminists, I mean I feel I'm a feminist, but I don't feel I belong to feminists. I think generally it is the feeling that it is too much for me to identify with all feminists, I mean, they are some different feminists who I don't identify with, it is not a coherent group. I think that this might be a result of the fact that the feminist practice is so difficult... I mean in terms of relationships between feminists...(r1)

The “traveling” back and forth between various identity loyalties can thus have different dimensions: Monika shifts more towards the „narrower“ identity politics, Ewa seems to gravitate towards the broader feminist narrative of “social justice” in an effort, perhaps, to avoid an “identity politics” trap.

In the complex identity conundrum commitment to feminism plays an important role as a bridge that connects various identities and experiences. Irena suspects that

we can say that feminism is a certain path of assimilation of Jews. Some Jews, who departed from the traditional Jewish culture in the 20th century, or between the wars, either have chosen the liberal, assimilation path, to this Polish society, and they became intelligentsia such as lawyers, doctors, or they became communists. And then there was a „special path for women, that I would dissolve all my identity problems in the „bigger“, more general cause...of women's rights (r23)

Irena thus sees feminism as a bridge – a path between traditional identities and emancipation, a path that materializes through assimilation to a broader cause of fighting women's oppression. In the context of the United States, the exposure to the women's movement gave some women the language to understand experiences of exclusion and discrimination and a context in which to join together with other women to make change

in their own lives and in society at large. Many women experienced the pain of exclusion from traditionally male areas of Jewish learning and ritual. For some, this exclusion became an early seed of feminism that seek inclusion in a public religious life for women. Equal participation in the Judaism has been a validating and empowering experience for many Jewish women. These women have tapped into a passion for learning and participation that has become a vital force for change in American Judaism. One result of feminism in the US has been women's recognition of the transformative power of women-only space, through ritual, and activity. In the traditional Jewish community in US in particular, this has provided an important feminist outlet (Pogrebin 1982). In Poland Jewish women rarely use feminism to seek the religious recognition. Here participation in women's movement represents more the way to both integrate into the mainstream Polish culture and at the same time to question the intrinsic character of some of its elements. In Poland, the balancing act of various identities and loyalties cannot, as some of the theorists of intersectionality argue, be seen simply as a process of juggling various, but fixed identities (Creenshaw 1991). The process of identity formation represents more than intersectionality of various axes as the layers of the "self" overlap and enhance each other. While there is no pure way of being Jewish that crosses roads with a pure way of being a feminist or lesbian, these are the subjects themselves that construct the complex relation between sexuality and culture in their individual narratives:

These are the levels of identity, that you discover at some point, when you think: "Oh, my god, I'm a woman, and so some things that happen to me are not incidental, and I need to read them from such perspective". My experience comes together as a certain narrative, readable only if you focus on certain axes of it. But on the other hand, my

mother is Jewish, I am a Jew, if I put the focus on that, I say “Oh my God, it is a typical story of the second generation, what happened there, in a sense of the family experience”. It is very typical to assimilated, prewar Jews, who survived war here and stayed here... And so I feel like a part of the certain braid... there is only a little of this braid left, so you are a dog, of the rare braid, more so you are a female of that race. There are many other races and you are some kind of braid, of which only a little is left after a pogrom. Of course I’m joking about the dogs, but in a way having this experience allows you possibility to get into certain level of consciousness, open certain path on which you can walk....(r25)

The conceptualization of the conflicted and ambiguous self requires coming to grips with the reality of in-betweenness. In his “Modernity and Ambivalence” Zygmunt Bauman attempts the reconstruction of the location of the ambiguous subjects and identifies modernity as being ‘about the production of order,’ to which suppression and exclusion of strangers, elimination of chaos, and ambivalence are crucial. Over the years Bauman, has been using his own trajectory to the analysis of the status of strangeness in the modern society. In the interview with Ulrich Beck, Bauman recalls his own experience of the identity formation in Poland:

I was not brought up as a Jew. I had no relation to Jewish life. I hadn’t been in the ghetto. There I might have learnt to be Jewish. One can say many bad things about the Soviet Russians of the time but the problem of nationality was not very important. I was Jewish but nobody took any notice. I joined the Polish Army, returned to Poland and felt myself to be Polish. I only recognized my Jewishness in 1967. Then there was not only an anti-intellectual but also an anti-Semitic campaign in Poland. The communist newspapers of the time read like the Nazi *Stürmer*, they used the same language. Someone even discovered that an instruction from leading members of the Communist Party was a

literal translation from the *Stürmer*. I had never changed my name. Others who had earlier changed their names to Polish ones were ‘unmasked’ in the newspapers. It was a really terrible atmosphere then. Most Polish Jews had the same experiences. They did not feel themselves Jewish but Polish. Suddenly they had to realize that this was not the case.

If you ask me how I became a Jew, this was the way that it happened (Beck 2006, 380)

Bauman has subsequently taken this notion of ambivalence and used it as an explanatory concept to understand the role of Jews in the modern world. In the early 1970s, he depicted an in-between – that he himself somehow exemplifies the ‘hybrid of modernity’ that undermines ‘the harmonious build-up of the human universe’ (Bauman, 1973b: 135). The Jewish experience, according to Bauman, can assist in identifying some of the main characteristics of the hybrid existence in the modern culture. Bauman has suggested that the space that has been occupied by the modern hybrid. This space of nowhere is particularly culturally and intellectually “fertile” as it is “somewhat less constrained by the rules”, and provides subjects with the ability to “see beyond’. In that sense, Bauman’s characterization of the Jewish experience does to some extent resemble feminists’ standpoints and conceptualizations of women’s experience. The Jews, as represented in *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Bauman, 1989b) and especially in *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991), become the insiders-outsiders who have access to a different type of knowledge not available to insiders.

The effect of the search for order is however ambivalent as it results in both: the discrimination of strangers and the reproduction of strangers at the same time (1991: 15). The binary order embedded in modern societies focuses on the production of the “pure” identities and the elimination of the “undecidables”. At the same time the “pure” identities can only constitute themselves in the reference to those who are strange and

undecided. Modernity, in Bauman's view inevitably generates ambivalent homeless subjects, as they are indispensable for the modern order to even start conceptualizing its "pure" subjects. In Bauman's conceptualization strangers are not "the others", enemies, foreigners, outsiders. Rather due to their physical and symbolic location, of "outsiders within" or native others positionality of strangers is highly ambivalent (Bauman 1991).

Shane Phelan argues that the existence of strangers disrupts what appears to be a natural border between polarized identities and narratives both: national and sexual. If social and cultural boundaries are fluid then clarity, certainty, and predictability are threatened (Phelan 2001). As being "near and not near, yet there", strangers are at the same time uncomfortable and the indispensable element of the narratives of nation. They are what Kristeva's calls "abjects":

neither acceptable nor removable, and their presence "persists within a culture or a psychic that aims to expel it" (Kristeva 1982,9)

More recently, the debate over the status of strangers and their inherent presence in Poland has been initiated by Jan Tomasz Gross's book *Neighbors*. Gross has posed an important conundrum raising the question of the status of Jews in Polish culture, and pointing to both the centrality and the repression of the ethnic question within the Polish identity debate (Gross 2001). The ambivalent subjects neighbors/enemies that Gross is talking about in his work are not situated in opposition to the larger conception of citizenship as the traditional "enemy" has been. Rather they sit "on the fence" as their relationship to the national ideal is 'slimy', and 'liquid'. The ambivalence, undecisiveness and in-betweenness, represented most directly by sexual *queers* who refuse to "disappear", epitomizes the threat to national identity as it questions both the borders and the binaries on which the national identity is constructed. Their insider-out

positionality threatens the dominant “insider/fixed” identity as it challenges and blurs the boundaries and the order of that secure the order of the social world. From the perspective of “order loving” modern societies the “other” or the strangers represent chaos and disruption of very fundamental idea of the secure homeland and native territory.

Public visibility of the strangers disrupts the social order, makes people feel uncomfortable and lost, and thus puts the individual, heterosexual, and collective national/Polish identity concept in jeopardy. In many respects, the stranger’s unclear and ambivalent positionality in the self/other dynamic, makes her more prone to be fraught with anxiety, and aggression (Gross 2001, Phelan 2000). What comes as a consequence of the rejection of the “order” of the nation is the threat of violence. Although Bauman describes the postmodern or ‘liquid’ modernity as a state of mind in which one is acutely aware of the fluid and relative nature of social reality and modern identities, he tends to suggest that the modern state’s obsession with ordering and thus with coercion and violence is now decentralized, diffused, and localized within neo-tribalism. Neo-tribes have a tendency towards intolerance and aggression because they have no solid ground to rest on apart from individual decisions. New communities are kept together under the territory classified as ‘culture’. The rejection of strangers in these communities is ‘verbalized in terms of incompatibility or unmixability of cultures’ (Bauman, 1993b: 17). It is that neo-tribal anxiety that undermines the struggle for imagined community that, one may argue lies behind the politicians refusal to protect equality marches in Poland. To make sure that the group is protected from violence is to acknowledge its existence, is to affirm its presence, is to invite it to participate in the public discourses. Moreover as it

requires new kinds of “rights” or “special rights” of protection it constitutes the threat to the stability and to the social order, rules of public space, and identity (Phelan 1996).

Liminality, liquidity and limbo status are the basic characteristics of the stranger. They are “fence sitters”, ones that are neither here nor there, subjects that belong neither inside nor outside. But ethnic and sexual strangers are treating “the order” not only by being present, they also send a mix message, engage simultaneously in two gestures, of affirmation (saying I am like you) and separation as they maintain their difference (I am different). The strangers decide to stand aside, refuse to choose the side refuse to and to identify (Bauman 1991). As such, strangers disrupt the binary dynamic of the social order. As they put into question both mainstream distinctions between hetero and homo and destabilize the meaning of Polishness, strangers are positioning themselves at the border outside of the existing order. Strangers are not, however, foreigners even as they are not considered “natives” to the mainstream politics. From their subaltern positions, strangers impact the mainstream political culture. They claim certain intellectual, symbolic, and physical space. They, as Bauman argues, refuse to remain confined to the “far away” land (Bauman 1991, 59).

Considered morally suspicious and culturally different, strangers are irremovable from society’s politics, culture, and consciousness. In the neoconservative discourse, the strangers – feminists, sexual minorities, and Jews, are neither invited nor welcomed. They are not easily classified as either friend or enemy. They are more like the occupants of space than their native holders. Their emotional ties to Poland are unclear either, as they do not respect borders, form cultural enclaves, and claim being cosmopolitan. Moreover in the anti-Semitic, antifeminists and homophobic discourse, the sexual and

national aspect of stranger-hood intersect as “strangers” carry with them the threat of recruitment and seduction which poses a direct danger for the survival of the Polish nation³⁷. (Beck 1996, 382). However even the neoconservatives, who deny strangers being “from here“ and claim that Jews, homosexuals, and feminists are foreign, do not provide precise answers as to where they originated and when they invaded the „safe“ space of the Polish homeland.

Deconstructing sexual and national binaries: *queering* citizenship in Poland.

The existence of the hybrid, strange, *queer* subjects within the public space raises number of questions considering the Polish political, cultural and national identity. One of the most urgent of them is the question of citizenship. Are strangers citizens? Should current conception of citizenship be reconstructed to fit hybrid identities of *queer* subjects? Or should strangers remain at the outskirts of the mainstream citizenship, enjoying some of the rights, while being denied others? According to Shane Phelan citizenship has a multiple functions; it guarantees fair treatment at home and protection abroad, social inclusion, visibility and the formal equality. It implies:

that one’s government, and one’s fellow citizens, concern themselves with one’s welfare and one’s opinion. Such concern (...) does require that the individual(s) in question not be denied the recognition embodied in central institutions and universal services such as police protection” (Phelan 2001, 3)

In such a conception of citizenship Phelan argues, the status of *queers* is that of an ethnic minority: even though they hold the passport of the state in which they reside, they are

³⁷ In the context of the Equality Parades for instance, in the right wing media, the gay pride parades have been continually represented as an import from Germany. The German gay and lesbian groups’ support for the Polish parades have been also seen as a instance of the “colonization” from the West. Similarly, in the number of recently published novels by the neoconservative authors, the theme of the male protagonist love affairs with a feminist prevails. In the novels the protagonists manage to convert feminist to “normalcy” at last.

denied legal protection as they do not conform to “narrow” conception of citizenship that is rooted in the “imagined” community (Mizielińska 2008). Phelan, in the context of US, and Mizielińska, in the context of Poland, argue that laws and institutions cannot be seen as detached from a deeper understanding of citizenship as the representation of what citizenship mean in each society (Mizielińska 2007, Phelan 2001). Laws and institutions have a power to make certain individuals and groups visible or silent. They are however extensions of specific understanding of who counts as community members; what are the cultural meanings and social values important to this community; and has the roots in the symbolic discourses of each society. We can find representations of what counts as “native” and inherited to particular cultures, and which symbolic and historic narratives are recognized as “ours” in various discursive formations; in literature, art, or media. To be denied a presence in the social, cultural narrative is to be denied the very core of citizenship and it translates into political exclusion. Denial of certain privileges and protections, which is a by-product of a narrow conception of citizenship, results in the formation of the “second class citizens” or “marginal citizens” (Phelan 18). Such citizens – based on their gender, sexuality, religion, nationality, or ethnicity – are driven by discriminatory practices of their compatriots to occupy marginal positions in the central institution of their own homelands (Forment 1995, 316).

In Poland, a narrow conception of citizenship as based on national homogeneity, Catholicism and heterosexuality, has been defined by the 1997 constitution. As Mizielińska has illustrated, this document does equate “men” and citizens (could use “people” which is gender neutral) and recognizes Christian heritage as the “universal origins of the nation”. Moreover, throughout the text, the Polish Constitution utilizes the

term “human family”, mentioning women only in the reference to “mothers” (every woman, before and after becoming a mother, is granted state “protection”). Finally, the Polish Constitution secures the definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman (man is always first), which “protects” the nation from the demands for same sex marriages. In Poland, like in other national contexts, the compulsory heterosexuality as presented in major legal documents, becomes the core of the narrow conception of citizenship and it is directed not solely against sexual minorities but against all citizens who do not meet the heteronormative rules. To use Cathy Cohen’s argument, it excludes from citizenship and recognizes as *queer* a larger number of people who are not confined to homogenous representation of what a Pole should be: the non-Catholics, non-native Poles, single parents (both women and men) as well non-mothers (Cohen 2000). In such sense the queering citizenship in Poland should be an interest of majority of us, particularly women.

Queer citizenship cannot be limited to participation and institutional protection but it is also a matter of visibility of certain groups in the various discourses. Phelan argues that before the equality and the recognition of the *queers* can be achieved, the symbolic sphere, the “queering of the political culture” is thus needed. Such a conception emphasizes the difference between sameness and equality and shows how contemporary, postmodern citizenship has to be based on the idea of solidarity “inside(r) out” through which the multiplicity of various forms and modalities of sexual practices, groups, and community engagement can be exercised. Exclusion does not mean that the stigma is attached to sexual difference, it simply means that political membership does not require

the elimination of all stigmas (Phelan 19). The stigmas preexist and divide the community between us and them.

Assimilation, retreat, and subversion are some of the strategic choices from which strangers can choose to avoid the violence but not to transform the social reality. In Poland, Hania argues Jewish women have only two choices, “to become part of the crowd or to become a feminist”.(reference) At the collective level, strategies of assimilation are represented by the normalization and sameness discourses. Mizielińska argues that the examples of the “Let them See Us” campaign illustrates how to become assimilated and how one has to eliminate sexuality and any deviation from binary conceptualizations of the sexuality from the emancipation discourses. Retreat to strangerhood is another strategy often employed by the minorities. Gay and lesbian bars, organizations, and gatherings are becoming increasingly popular. At the level of citizenship, however, Phelan reminds us that none of these strategies makes an attempt to destabilize the narrow definition of citizenship (Phelan 2001).

Alternatively, an attempt to subvert the hierarchies of the hegemonic order can be a successful strategy to point to the gaps and contradictions of the “modernity” order (Phelan 2001 32. Revealing the gap allows inscribing the experience of strangers onto the national narrative, which could potentially transform the narrow conception of citizenship. This process that Shane Phelan calls “queering the citizenship”, suggests that “rather than fleeing from strangeness sexual strangers may offer one another and others new ways of questioning the current tight fabric of citizenship and national identity “ (Phelan 8).

In his book *Thinking Sociologically* Bauman demonstrates how an ‘us and them’ mentality underlies the construction of a collective identity and the ways in which the stranger plays a pivotal role in this process (Bauman 1990). The product of such mentality is binary thinking, which to some extent has been dominating the Polish feminist movement for the last 20 years. More currently, the experience of diversity and ambivalence is becoming a central focus of the feminist debates in Poland. Moreover and more often, “diversity” is being embedded in a local context of Polish history, geography, and culture. While nationalism seeks unification and homogeneity achieved through the act of drawing boundaries between natives and aliens, feminism draws from the scattered narratives that utilize a variety of the levels of Polish culture and resonate with diverse registers of a Polish collective identity (Bauman, 1992: 683).

Like Catholic feminists whose identity and positionality within the women’s movement I explored in previous chapter, Jewish and lesbian feminists represent a certain kind of the hybrid feminist identity. The positionality of the lesbian feminists within the feminist movement and within the Polish public discourse represents the ways in which the identity difference dynamics works, to eliminate ambivalence and uncertainty. Boundaries – physical and symbolic –, still being constructed to exclude strangers. Even more so, one of the conditions of modernity is that as the struggle against ambivalence intensifies, the neo-tribes and fundamentalist are still fighting the war against ambivalence; but this war against boundary crossing has moved from the state to the realm of imagined. At the same time, more and more often both the binaries are being challenged, many activists and feminist scholars asks, following Susan Friedman and Renato Rosaldo, if the polarization between “us” and “them” which lies behind the

identity formation process, can be destabilized, in order to include and recognize the strangerhood as indispensable if not immanent positionality.

Although in many ways problematic the trajectory of the of the Jewish women, and Jews as a group within the narrative of Polish discourse on citizenship, can provide a useful model for “inscribing” the experience of sexual minorities into the ways in which Polishness is defined as a territory and identity that becomes a foundation for granting certain groups their full civil rights.

Conclusions: Liberal or leftist, mass or scattered, local or transnational? Polish feminism and the concept of the “cultural politics”

Feminist scholars across the world have asked: What is feminist identity? How female consciousness translates into a collective action (Eduards 1994, Kaplan 1982, hooks 1989). What constitutes feminist movement and what is its uniqueness? (Alvarez 1998, Dahlerup 1987, Hawkesworth 2006, Lang 1997, Mansbridge 1995, Naples and Desai 2000) In her essay, “What is feminist movement?” Jane Mansbridge proposes a definition of feminism that consists of three elements: self- definition, resistance and action. She argues:

Feminist identities are usually achieved not given, particularly in the first generation of the second wave. Many feminists who are now activists have gone through a powerful personal transformative experience in which over some period they “became” feminists. Their identities changed as they saw that the explanations in “street theory” explained their lives, as they made the ideals of that theory their women and as they took a risk and bore the costs to advance these ideal in the word in which they lived (Mansbridge 1995, 34)

For Mansbridge, like for other feminist such as bell hooks, what distinguishes feminism from the women’s movement is its ultimate goal: “to end sexist oppression” (hooks 1989):

What distinguishes the feminist movement from movements simply by and for women is that the feminist movement is directed to ending male domination. This line between feminist and the women’s movement is not completely clear. Movements by and for women, including anti-feminist movements, may in the long run help end male domination by, among other things, promoting women’s political consciousness.

Movements by and for women are also vital for improving women's lives. Women's organizations, women's literature, women's politics or even women's fashions, directed not toward ending male domination but toward producing whatever women now want, will inevitably intertwine with the feminist movement in collaboration and in combat (Mansbridge 1995 33)

Through an ongoing conversation and exchange feminists constitute their own narrative and, discourses, which become the foundation of the movements unique identity.

Feminism is not only activism but it is also a certain narrative:

(...) This discursively created movement is the entity that inspires movement activists and is the entity that they feel accountable. It is changing, open to new insights and interpretations, but consistent at its core: the commitment to ending male domination.

(Mansbridge 1995, 29)

Being feminists can be carried out by producing theory, establishing institutions – particularly NGOs, the existence of the radical “street feminism”, and the emergence of a group of femocrats active at the state and local administration level. There are number of modes of feminist identities: from a theory making to street activism, from individual experiences through interaction with other women and men to political actions, feminism is an open-ended narrative. Similarly, the feminist movement is not a composite of the individuals who claim they are feminist; it is not an aggregate term describing all women who are active or describing themselves as feminists. Mansbridge argues that the feminist movement is constituted through its “internal accountability”:

Today feminists identities are created and enforced when feminists get together, act together, and read what other feminist have written. Talking and acting creates street theory and gives it meaning. Reading keeps one in touch and continues to make one

think. Both experiences, of personal transformation and continued interaction make feminists “internally accountable” to the feminist movement. (...) the only thing that we can expect to unite feminists across these differences is an internal accountability to a discursively created self-transforming, internally contested feminist movement (Mansbridge 1995, 33).

Does the Polish women’s movement meet Mansbridge definition of feminism, created in the contexts of the US? What are the specificities of the movement’s location and its consequences?

The ambivalent location of Polish feminism between East and West, South and North results in the emergence of hybrid political identities, ones that aim at re-rooting Polish feminism in the local legacies mediated through the transnational context. This fragmented political identities that emerge as a result of such a complex imbrications of local and the global are many times seen as politically impotent. In Poland, the fragmentation and diversity of feminist mobilizations in the post-communist context is often mistaken for a lack of social movements in the region (Einhorn 1993, Dunin 2006, Ghodese 2004, Graff 2008) Because of the scattered character of existing feminist activism its presence is often questioned or overlooked. Moreover, fragmentation of the movement, its overlapping character, and various focuses are often interpreted as evidence of the complete demobilization of women. In the past, many authors – Polish feminists and activists included, argue that after the collapse of the communist system, under which forced participation in collective actions was often the norm, people in these societies have turned to individualism.

In this conclusionary chapter I argue that the lack of a mass women’s mobilization must be interpreted as the end of the mass mobilization social movement

paradigm rather than the lack of the movement itself. What we experience in Poland, and more broadly in the post-socialist countries is not lack of “women’s consciousness,” “feminism by design” (Ghodese 2004), or backlash “without feminism” (Graff 2008). Rather we are witnessing the emergence of new form of women’s mobilizations, scattered and fragmented. What is characteristic to this new modality of feminism is its condensation in time and space, co-existence of various sources and origins of power and oppression as well as on multiple: local , national, and transnational scales through which mobilizations take place (Sandoval 2000, Desai 2005). The shift from a vertical conceptualization of power and mobilization agins power, to a horizontal mobilizations agins variety of powers, requires at the same time recognition of fragmented social realities and numoerus sources of hegemonies and countre hegemonies. It opens up possibilities for exploring the unexpected and often perplexing ways in which women’s political subjectivities are emerging in the post-socialist context.

The paradigm shift from mass to scattered social movements, I argue, needs to be explored at three registers: 1.) diversity of feminist identities, 2.) lack of a scalar focus on the movement- its simultaneous utilization of various local, national, and transnational political spaces, and 3.) the shift from a feminist “critical mass” approach towards the “political culture” paradigm. In Poland, women did not and do not mobilize within a single “mass” social movement largely because they represent various priorities, ideological loyalties, and structural affiliations. In the first section of these conclusions I will delineate yet another ideological aspect of diversity within Polish feminist identities-. I argue that the Polish feminists’ “socioliberalism” that emerges at the intersection of the local legacies of the secular left, socialist state, and transnational discourse of liberal

feminism, is an instance of such a process. Second, in Poland the focus on the transnational feminist organizing has often times been blurred, largely due to the lack of dialogue between Second World and other locations. The case of reproductive rights activism, I argue, instantiates the new conceptualization of the importance of the transnational feminist activism in Poland. Finally, the trajectory of Polish feminism challenges the mass mobilization based feminist movement paradigm. I argue that in Poland feminism enters mainstream politics through, “the back door” and thus represents an instance of the “cultural politics” model of feminism, affecting the mainstream public sphere from its subalterns.

1. Liberal or leftist?: ideological contentions

“Not all feminists have to be socialists”. This sentence, published in March 2008 at a feminist portal, *Feminoteka*, was made by Magda Środa, a former Plenipotentiary for Equal Status of Women and Men (member of the left wing government); the number one person under fire in Polish feminism. It was particularly controversial in the midst of 2008, a year that marked clearly the shift towards more socialist discourses. Interestingly enough, a couple of days earlier, Środa participated in the Warsaw Manifa as one of the leaders of the feminist movement and she stood next to the labor union organizers who announced to the Manifa’s demonstrators, “It’s all liberalism’s fault”. Środa’s “coming out” as a liberal feminist has also been a consequence of her interview with the national daily “*Gazeta Wyborcza*”, in which she supported the new law that denied the protection of women who decided to take medical leave during the first months of their pregnancy. Środa stated that her position was a form of protest against “making the pregnancy divine” and treating women as “holy cows”. She argued:

Before we start to build a welfare state we have to have something to build it upon. We, Poles just freed ourselves from real socialism to the labor market and now we want socialism back even before the free market economy became prolific. We have to give a break to the small businesses and then come back to the welfare state” (Środa 2008)

Środa’s support for the new labor code outraged some feminists with a particularly harsh critique coming from Ewa Charkiewicz, one of the founders of the feminist think-tank.

Charkiewicz argued that Środa was undermining solidarity among women and demanded that, in the name of “common good” (a.k.a. economic growth); women who are underpaid and pregnant sacrifice their rights, as their situation will worsen under the new law. Charkiewicz argued that while the current feminist movement in Poland follows the liberal conception of social justice that emphasizes the values of individual women’s rights, it lacks the conceptualization of the women’s collective well-being. The treatment of the reproductive rights as women’s individual “problem” is only one example of such individualization of women’s rights. Similarly, while liberal feminism focuses its efforts on the well-being of middle class women, who are economically independent and well, it disregards the well-being of those groups of women whose situations vary from the ideal. Charkiewicz argued:

Social movement without the theory of subordination will end with the only superficial mobilization, which was seen on the Manifa yesterday in Warsaw... which was very crowded but with the exception of the Solidarity 1980 and Demokracja Pracownicza there were no social slogans at all” (Środa 2008)

Charkiewicz claimed that in order to be able to conceptualize women’s well-being we should ask if there is a collective women’s interest, build the broader coalition with

working class women, and ask to what extent economic differences between women impact their needs. She argued:

Do women live off the air? Do they all have access to health care? Can health issues be reduced to abortion? [Should it be available] only to those who have a lot of money for private health care? One of the slogans said that the right (wing) is hazardous to health. Is only the right a problem? As if the parliamentary left and PO [Civic Platform] don't commercialize health care and don't vote for the laws that erase women's and human rights." (Środa 2008)

In the broader context of Poland, the Środa- Charkiewicz exchange represented the tension between liberalism and socialism. After the fall of communism, and partially as representation of the counterforce to state socialism, liberalism has become a leading paradigm in thinking about the economy and social issues in Poland. Both mainstream politicians and feminists to some degree, also incorporate the liberal ideal into their political agenda and practice. Many socialist feminists who felt excluded from feminism defined in such a way, perceived liberalism as a corrupting factor in the fight for women's rights. But the debate also had an identity dimension as, according to Charkiewicz Środa's statement, is representative of a certain model of feminism that became dominant in Poland: the middle class, academic, "Warsaw" feminism that does not care about working class women, thus can be supportive of neoliberal economic policies. Those women, Charkiewicz argued, represent the feminist identity based on liberal individualism. But:

It, at the same time shows the weakness of Polish "noble" feminism, in which one can say something about women at the University, but only within what is acceptable from the "good girls" (poetry, literature, or poor children's education). Such a definition also

confuses the discourses on feminism and women. On one hand, we have feminism's politics of representation, the ways in which feminism is seen in media as reduced to equal status, abortion and violence- but only in the family and gender stereotypes in media. On the other, there is a so called social reality, which is absent from the noble feminists analyses, because they are pre-occupied with literature not the analysis of the patriarchy and ways in which it is rooted in state, law, market economy, or social inequalities. (Środa 2008)

Liberal feminism, according to Charkiewicz, is rooted in the desire to “share” the benefits of the post-socialist transformation with men. Charkiewicz argues:

In her article, Magda constructs two general, essential categories: women against men, which mobilizes women to fight with men for an equal “piece” of cake”/ advantages of the transformation. In August 1980, men wrote on the wall “women go home, we fight for Poland”, and they won Poland, for themselves. Because differences between women are, in this essentialism, rather blurred (there are no class differences, rural- urban differences, age differences, or religious differences). Such constructed mobilizations will benefit women who are privileged. For many women, a pie that women and men are supposed to share is rotten.” (Środa 2008)

The exchange between Charkiewicz and Sroda, while it marked a new beginning for the ideological debates in Polish feminism, also missed the point of seeing the current feminist movement from the perspective of its specific trajectory. In the context of post-socialism, the critique of the liberal feminism from socialist positions is often seen as an oversimplified attempt to translate the western contention between “radical” and “liberal” feminists into the Polish context, one that misses the deeper outlook into the dynamics of the movement. In her critique of liberalism, Charkiewicz, for instance, did not mention NGOs as a part of the feminist movement. She further did not recognize the

multidimensionality of feminist activism in which the ideological loyalties have been intersecting with strategic choices and pragmatic alliances. In the “defense” of Środa, Joanna Piotrowska reminded us that Środa’s affiliation was not so straightforward: as a philosopher she first started gender studies courses at Warsaw’s University; as Plenipotentiary of Equal Status in the socialist government, she mobilized local women’s leaders through countless meetings in little towns; as a feminist essayist she dared to challenge the most controversial topics in Polish politics such as abortion, gay rights, and the Catholic Church’s impact on the Polish society’s attitude towards violence against women. Finally the exchange seemed to miss other historical dimension of the location of feminism between liberalism and socialism. While Charkiewicz represented liberalism simply as neoliberal capitalism, Środa defended it from the position of individualism as opposed to socialist collectivism. Środa, like other feminists who have connected their experiences of social movement with fighting authoritarian state socialists, is hesitant towards socialism itself. Agata argued:

When I hear „socialism” I’m all turned off, I just don’t like socialism. I like welfare state and I like social policy but I have a repulsion when it comes to socialism. It comes from my youth, I can control it and I’m trying to overcome it, but I was brought up by the opposition movement and in the axiom that the free market guarantees freedom of speech (...) So on one hand I repel socialism, on the other I know that socialism emancipated women. (r19)

Many younger feminists are now eager to criticize the ways in which liberal ideology has been introduced into transforming Poland in the early 1990s. They like Ania argue that it was feminists’ disappointment with neo-liberalism that allowed left wing discourses to re-surface in Polish politics:

I think in Poland it was a matter of very successful propaganda. I also thought so when I first started to have any kind of political views. Liberalism, I thought was awesome, because liberalism is freedom, freedom from discrimination. Everybody can do various identities, rights for all, and so on. This was my association. I think there was an assumption – and feminists had that assumption, that before 1989, knowledge was ideological because of censorship and so on. And after 98, there was freedom. Then thanks to feminism we realized that there is no freedom. Feminism made us see that. All of the sudden, if you were a feminist some things couldn't be said. I will not know about women's history in school. And then you see that that this is ideological knowledge, because you experience it yourself, but it is for different reasons than under PRL. I think in that sense feminism opened the road to the left wing thinking in Poland (r34)

For older feminists such radical rejection of the liberal discourses is much harder as they cherish their connection with the Solidarity legacy. With them, too, however, “pure” liberalism does not fit well. Some of them thus look for the middle road, something in between liberalism and socialism - socioliberalism:

On one hand I'm very hesitant towards socialism, on the other hand I know that socialism emancipate women. Of course it emancipated women, you can argue from the feminist perspective for the sake of the double work load and less distribution. However, it emancipated them mentally. So on one hand there is a negation of socialism, because nobody likes socialism of Gomulka or Gierek, on the other there is awareness that it was period that was fruitful in a sense of emancipation. It is good that socialism was defeated by the economic transformation, but it was bad that the transformation men's de-emancipation. Me of course I would be for something like that: transformation is still going on, there is no socialism, but there is a welfare state, this is what I call liberalism.

But of course such socio-liberalism, being individualistic and defined by individual rights empowers emancipation (r5).

As odd as it may seem, such a pairing of liberalism and socialism does make sense for many feminists in Poland. Moreover, the disappointment with the ways in which “translated” feminisms did not fit the Polish contexts, led many feminist to turn to local historical narratives and to root their socialism beyond the post-war socialist state. By moving away from the paradigm of the liberal feminism, many women are now attempting to re-root Polish left wing feminist thinking into the trajectory of the Polish pre-war secular left:

In Poland feminism is rooted in the tradition of intelligentsia’s left, leftist intelligentsia, community oriented, and emancipatory.. (r23)

The secular left was the formation that at the same time supported the emancipation of women and Polish Jews. For many Jewish women the secular leftist tradition became a path to both assimilation and personal independence:

Although I would not universalize this, of course if someone has Jewish roots she might identify with a certain tradition, a tradition of intelligentsia. Pre-war Jews thought, that was, as far as I understand the rational, anticlerical, enlighten and progressive force that went against national Catholic thought. But of course with “professional intelligentsia”, women’s genealogical roots are broader than that. We (feminists) have a great genealogical, symbolic, and not ethnic embodiment in a certain chain of generations of women who have reached for knowledge, which Maria Janion continues to write about in her work. The rural nobility circles, national emancipation symbolism, which translated into emancipation in general, are very strong. Women representatives in the interwar period were not only Jews. Women from intelligentsia, from rural nobility because they had to subscribed strongly to the emancipatory discourses. On the other

hand many writers such as Orzeszkowa, are taking on Jewish issues as well. So it was in a way a common goal, the genealogy of Polish feminism is more multilayered.... We should reconstruct it so that in Poland when you talk about tradition there is no hegemony of national tradition. We often overlook the emancipatory tradition, which was here (r23)

Historically, liberalism has been used by feminists and other progressive movements to fight, not only state socialism but also neoconservative discourses that denied women's subjectivities and treated women as objects rather than subjects of public debate. It thus has to be seen, like socialism, more as a phase in the trajectory of Polish feminism rather than its entire identity. The combination of the disappointment with the effects that neo-liberal state policies had on women, and getting to know women's personal and collective past led some of the feminists to re-rooting of the history of Polish feminism not only in pre-war secular left but also in the socialist traditions of Solidarity. Some women point to the fact that after the fall of socialism, some Polish feminists wanted to distance themselves from the legacies of socialism and at the same time the socialism leftist tradition. Nowadays, many feminists remind us that Solidarity itself was a socialist movement and many of its leaders such as Jacek Kuron have openly been communists. If the feminists reject socialism they, in a sense, reject their own history – the legacy of the movement with which they identify. The efforts to regain the leftist narrative are most currently embedded in feminist alliances with trade unions, workers associations, and leftist groups such as "Krytyka Polityczna". Those efforts mark an attempt to disrupt the linear trajectory of contemporary Polish feminism and illuminate the diversity and co-existence of various seemingly contradictory feminist narratives in individual and collective feminist trajectories. They also point to the variety of sources of power and

recognize both leftist and liberal discourses as at the same time hegemonic and counter-hegemonic.

Moreover, recent attempts to re-root Polish feminism in the leftist traditions combine not only two local emancipatory narratives but also draw from the global/transnational spaces. Hania stated:

My real points of reference are Shana Penn and Ann Snitow in the US and Bożena Umińska, Kazia Szczuka, and Boy Żeleński³⁸ in Poland. (r13)

The popular, although often-contested, comparison between homophobia, sexism, and anti-Semitism that I have described in Chapter Six emerges at this kind of intersection of various identities - gender, cultural, ethnic, and of various spaces, both local and global. The aim to re-gain patriotism in Poland is embedded in proclamations of the love to the country, but it does not appear in the transnational vacuum. On the contrary, globalization and its consequences provide a fruitful context for such declarations. For “patriotic feminism’s” narrative in the dialogue not only with the Polish but also the global contexts, like in the case of previously quoted blogger:

I’m one of those, who rather than talk and runaway, will try to increase the quality of life, at least in my own yard (...) I describe myself as a „patriot“ and I’m sorry that right now this term has right wing connotations. I couldn’t live in US or any country in Europe for longer. I’m tied here with the invisible string. I can travel, yes, or ever go away for couple of months. But I couldn’t start a new life somewhere abroad (...) Of course it is a matter of friends and family. Also, what I do, who I am here and what I’m involved in. I know I have a lot to do here, and I know how to do it. And I love Polish home-cooking:) I only wish Polish flag was sexier, like British or US . (chylkiem-I-duszkciem.blog.onet.pl)

³⁸ Bożena Umińska (Bożena Keff) is a Polish-Jewish writer, poet and feminists. Kazimiera Szczuka is a literary critic and feminist activist. Tadeusz Boy Żeleński was a pre-war activists and a writer.

2. Local or transnational: multidimensional geographical focus

The current emphasis on feminist theories of transnational women's activism is one of the stages of the continuing effort of women's movements to go beyond the local or national borders (Basu 2004, Hawkesworth 2006). Transnationalism as an incarnation of the women's movement's international manifestation is indispensably correlated with the specificities of the process of globalization. However, at the same time, scholars across the world have been pointing to the fact that women in many locations are still uncomfortable with the term transnational, as it is reminiscent of the transnational corporations (Desai, 2005, 322). Furthermore, they point out that it does represent the two contradictory processes that have been intersecting within the context of globalization; democratization and the growing hegemony of neo-liberalism. The interplay of opposing trends is visible particularly in Third World locations as well as in the countries that have recently undergone systemic transformations. In many locations, the process of the democratization is accompanied by both the continuing expansion of neo-liberal policies in the economy and the reemergence of religious fundamentalism. The context of the Second World's transformation is similar. However, the fact that this location has little previous engagement in the transnational feminist debates, together with a particular focus on Polish feminisms' transnational agenda on reproductive rights, marks the specificity of transnational activism in Poland.

In the majority of the interviews I have conducted for this research, the transnational context too remains rather a background for conversation about, fore-grounded local and state level feminist activism. The Polish women's movement does have successes in the transnational feminist arena. Not only do the majority of the regional feminist networks –

like those discussed in this thesis (e.g. NEWW, KARAT or Astra), have their bases in Poland, but also Polish feminist regularly reach out to the transnational institutions, particularly at the EU level to get assistance and solidarity predominantly in the area of reproductive rights. A quick glance at the “Abortion Laws” map illuminates a tension within the geography of women’s global sexual rights³⁹. While Poland and Ireland’s restrictive abortion laws remain the “blind spots” in the Northern, “developed” part of the world, one can ask to what extent the “western” path of achieving the right to choose for women fits into the progression of the women’s movements in the Second World. How do reproductive rights discourses travel? Can they be appropriated differently in various locations? For many activists the supranational political space, represented by the European Union, has become the crucial arena in which urgent issues concerning women’s reproductive rights can be addressed. The particular status of the European institutions, such as the European Court of Human Rights, that have an actual decisive

³⁹ Although since 1956 abortion was legal for both health and social reasons, no single document was issued on that problem by the Catholic Church authorities for over 40 years. Clearly abortion became a question of “national morality” and the part of the “purification of the nation” process, which many might argue has been conducted successfully and led to the passivity of women in the area of the reproductive rights. Since 1989, the Catholic Church started to mobilize and try to influence various groups of Polish society, which potentially could initiate the change in the Polish law. As a result in 1992, at the national convention, doctors came up with the Code of Medical Ethics, which designated “social abortion” as unacceptable from a “moral” point of view. Even though abortion remained legal it was harder and harder to perform one in the public medic-care institutions. In 1992, the right wing government restricted the right to abortion. After the election in 1993, the left-wing government re-established the liberal law. In 1997, however, after a presidential veto, the Constitutional Tribunal recognized the right to an abortion as illegal. Since then, abortion is legal only if the pregnancy is a threat to a woman’s life, if the pre-natal examination proves t severe damage in the fetus, or if the pregnancy is the result of a crime. According to official forces, during the year 2003, only 365 women had an abortion in Poland (there are 40 million people in the country). According to the Federation on Women and Family Planning, which is the biggest organization that fights for the right to legal abortion, about 100 thousand women had abortions in the same year. (They can be more reliable as a source because they actually help women to have a free abortion) there is huge abortion underground in Poland and abortions are performed in public critique all around Poland. Information about the procedure can be found everywhere. The most spectacular examples are in daily newspapers where there are 100s of ads everyday that advertize abortions under the cover of the “ helping women to get back their period”. For that reason, there is no big abortion tourism, which is the case in Ireland. At the same time there is no sexual education in schools, there is the course on family instead, and contraception is not widely available (no contraception is refund by the public medic-care)

power over the Polish state, have been contributing to strengthening the positionality of the women's movement in Poland and trans-nationally.

Since the very beginning of the EU negotiation the issues of the reproductive rights in Poland has been often brought up in the context of disparity between abortion laws adopted by majority of the EU countries and very restrictive Polish ruling in case of abortion. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, during the 2000 election campaign, although the Polish left promised to “take care” of the abortion law, the former prime minister changed his position on abortion practically overnight. Many argued that this shift had to do with securing the support of the Catholic Church for the EU accession. Feminists have been intervening actively with such governmental positions, both at the local and the supranational, European level. To have a modern and progressive abortion law became, for women's activists, a major hope related to the EU accession. This priority has often been formulated in terms of “catching up” with Western Europe. One of the leaders of a feminist organization in Krakow argued:

During the negotiation, the government attitude was that the most important thing is to enter the EU, and women's issues can be addressed sometime in the future. But we got anxious about it, we started to question this perspective in which, first we have to get other things done and after we can talk about women's rights (...) We wanted to enter EU with a modern abortion law, and the law that is adjusted to what is going on in the Western Europe (NWP25).

Although the European Union and European feminists have for a long time been hesitant towards engaging with the question of abortion rights in Poland, the rapid growth of Polish feminist movements not only motivated the move beyond the borders of the conservative nation state, but also forced some international institutions and organization

to get involved in the abortion debate in Poland. For instance, facing the government-Catholic Church agreement in the area of reproductive rights that I have described in Chapter Two, on May 2002, sixty-nine women's organizations signed an open letter to the European Commission pointing to the incompatibility of Polish abortion laws with those existing in Member States. Hundred Polish women leaders living in Poland and abroad signed a similar letter. Although EU cannot regulate national abortion laws in Member States, as a response to these letters, the European Parliament did pass a resolution supporting women's right to choose (EP, 2002).

Another instance of local- transnational engagement was the visit of the Dutch organization "Women on Waves" in Poland, in 2003. The visit was initiated by the coalition of local Polish women's groups ("Ster" Committee) and has shown the power of the transnational cooperation in both a political and geographical sense. For a week, the "Women on Waves" ship provided certain number of Polish women with the reproductive services just beyond the Polish border, on the transnational waters of Baltic Sea.

Most recently, the attempts to bring the question of women's sexual rights into the supranational political space and to subvert the state's dominance in the area of women's reproductive rights resulted in the 2007 European Court of Human Rights decision to recognize Alicja Tysiac grievances against the Polish state⁴⁰. Alicja's case sparked a

⁴⁰ Since 2000, Alicja Tysiac has been suffering from the serious eye condition. After giving birth to two of her children, her sight worsened gradually to (-5). When she realized she was pregnant, the doctor advised her to undergo an abortion as the pregnancy could cause an internal stroke and blindness. According to Polish law, Alicja qualified for an abortion, so shortly after her doctor's visit she started to collect the relevant documents to receive permission to undergo the abortion procedure. With her initial set of documents she came to hospital, but was rejected and sent home with instructions to obtain more documents. If she would be unable to present such, she was told the doctor would not perform the abortion for "ethical" reasons. Three ophthalmologists confirmed the presence of the disease as life threatening for Alicja. Her family doctor was concerned about the impact of pregnancy on her sight, and certified that she

debate over reproductive rights and helped to reframe the question of the right to choose in terms of women's health, rather than a "positive compromise" between the Polish state and the Catholic Church, which feminists want to destroy. As it provoked very radical and hostile responses from the right and radical Catholic activists,⁴¹ it also made apparent to what extent the question of the access to legal abortion is still politicized in Poland. Some of the conservative politicians and Catholic authorities have been wondering, "How is Alicia's child feeling"? and arguing that Alicia's child will be suffering from post-abortion syndrome. The critics of Alicia's decision to go the court argued that she abandoned her child and left a life-long scar by implying that she regrets that it was born. Some went even further by arguing that it is the duty of each Catholic to care for an

met the criteria for an abortion. A number of gynecologist that Alicja visited refused to provide her with the written recommendation. In 2001, Alicja had a third child and her health worsened drastically. She was diagnosed with the first group disability, which codified her as a person who not only cannot take care of her three children but also required the constant care of the third party. After giving birth, Alicja also lost her job. Alicja Tysi c started looking for social justice in Poland, but her case was dismissed in various court instances. Polish law did not allow for an independent medical commission to examine Alicja's case. In 2002, Alicja filed a complaint against the Polish state in the European Court of Human Rights. She argued that her privacy and family life (according to the Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights) her right to just appellation (Article 13 of the Convention) as well as the equal treatment rule (Article 14 of the Convention), had all been violated. The Federation for Women and Family Planning, and the Helsinki Foundation guided Alicja through the judicial process, providing her with the lawyer, and participating in the court case. In March 2007, the European Court of Human Rights has announced that Poland harmed Alicja's privacy and her family life. The Polish government was ordered to pay Alicja 25,000 Euros. In the Court judgment we read that Polish law does not: "contain any effective mechanism capable of determining whether the conditions for obtaining a lawful abortion had been met". Anna Wilkowska-Landowska, Tysi c's lawyer, argued, "Polish law did not protect Alicja Tysi c's health when she was most vulnerable".

⁴¹One of the young Polish MP representatives of the League of Polish Families argued: "I understand that Alicia Tysiac has found herself in a difficult situation, but her child will soon be old enough to be aware that her own mother is suing the state that didn't allow her to kill her own child. That she allowed herself to be used by feminist propaganda on behalf of abortion, is going to cause huge damage to this child. If someone would ask me what I think Alicia Tysi c should do, I would advise her not to make this case public, even if she has a different opinion than her doctors and the state have. I would advise her not to make this case public for the sake of the well-being of her child. "In the radical right and in the Catholic Church's eyes, the Tribunal's ruling not only harmed the well-being of Alicia's unborn child but also that of Poland itself. The head of the Polish Catholic Church, Arch-bishop J zef Glemp argued, "the judgment on the unborn life is being unjustly imposed on Poland. The mother accuses doctors, that they didn't let her execute their own child. Poland and Polish doctors are being punished for saving a life." Ref???

unborn child. The very negative and hostile responses that accompanied Tysiąc's victory have indicated the extent to which the question of abortion is politicized and how radically women's right to well-being is still rejected by some mainstream institutions in Poland.

One of the indicators of the changing character of the Polish abortion debate, from an emphasis on the Church-state "compromise" towards women's rights was the shift in public opinion. Throughout the process and especially after the court judgment, people who have not been engaging in abortion debate, in case of Alicja Tysiąc, have supported Tysiąc's argumentation that her right to privacy and family life has indeed been harmed. Similarly, in the aftermath of Tysiąc's case, feminist groups utilized this as an opportunity to draw women's attention to a number of other cases in which women became disabled, or gave birth to a disabled child because a doctor refused to provide them with a prenatal examination or the written consent for abortion. Feminists argued also that the denial of Alicja's abortion represented both a disrespect for the Polish law and a disrespect for women's well-being, understood here as her right to physical health. Throughout the process and especially after the court ruling, people who have not been engaging in the abortion debate, in the case of Alicja Tysiąc, have supported feminist arguments. The ultraconservatives' attempt to juxtapose the "life of the child" and the "selfish choice" of the woman have been harshly critiqued by the media:

The voice to the Tribunal will initiate another phase of the Polish argument about abortion. The Minister of health agrees with the Strasburg ruling. But we already know those who will not agree are the self-appointed judges of other people's morality. They are so convinced about their "life" issues that they deny Alicja Tysiąc any kind of

respect.(...) they do not see a person in woman, all they see is an uncomplicated reproductive mechanism (Kołodziejczyk 2007)

Even some progressive Catholics, emphasized that Alicja Tysiąc's claims were justified within Polish law. The president of the Warsaw's of the Club of The Catholic Intelligentsia argued:

Such comments indicate Polish primitivism and the lack of sensitivity and respect for a woman.

(...) Alicja Tysiąc had a right to a legal abortion because she met one of the conditions to terminate the pregnancy. It would be unruly to demand heroism from her, if the law doesn't require it (Wiśniewska 2007)

Finally, the media emphasized the role that supranational, European level plays and will continue to play in the future of the Polish debate on reproductive rights:

Our state doesn't support conscious motherhood, and the doctors don't either. (...) Alicja Tysiąc reminded us that we belong to Europe. Polish women who were denied abortion in Poland can have it the other country. It will happen sooner or later. And the Polish health care system will pay for it (Ostałowska 2007)

Public opinion, one can argue, transformed thanks to the transnational feminists activism that, while reaching out to supranational institutions, combines crossing national borders with framing local, national, and regional goals in terms of the "transnational" or global discourses (Desai 2005: 319). Although their transnational engagements still refer to the nation state as a crucial actor in the political process, the goal of such activism is twofold: to embed the local issues and strategies in the global and to make the global issue become visible in local struggles. As in other locations, in Poland engaging in the transnational feminist activism includes providing education, strategic use of information, as well as

advocacy and the effort to impact local, national and international policies effecting women (Desai 2005, 321). The proponents of the transnational women's movements argue that they are a proper response to the processes of globalization and embody the effort to mainstream women's issues at various levels of the social and political life. In the context of the First and the Third Worlds, critics of transnational feminist activities argue that many times they are disconnected from the women's masses they claim to represent. They argue that although for many women involved in transnational activism, the need to represent women is a priority, they often times still remain removed from local women's struggles. Waterman, for instance, states that the transnational women's movement instantiates the process of globalization from the middle as they were mainly created and are maintained by middle class women (Waterman, 2000).

In her article "Transnationalism: The face of feminist politics post-Beijing", Manisha Desai argues that although transnational feminism became the dominant, paradigmatic discourse of the women's movement after Beijing, the most significant outcome of UN politics on women has been a development of the mainly discursive tools towards women's equality. Desai argues further that in the post-Beijing context "(some) women's agency is visible everywhere even as (most) women's lives remain mired in multiple inequalities" (Desai 2005, 320). In Poland, while NGOs and feminism as such have been subjects of critiques emphasizing the lack of connectivity between women's lives and feminist activism, such criticism is voiced rarely in reference to transnational feminist engagements. On one hand, they are marginal in the feminist movement, largely due to the lack of colonial and postcolonial narratives in the region. As the headquarters of major international institutions are located in the Western Europe and the US, the

ability to obtain resources and access to an international platform appear as crucial to the debate about the efficiency of transnational activism. Although the ideal of transnationalism as opposed to previous conceptualizations of the international women's movement assumes greater horizontal involvement and carefulness of the lines of the geopolitical power dynamics and lines of exclusions, access to the material and discursive resources, the unequal distribution of representation, and visibility within the transnational framework prevails. On the other hand, however, as transnational women's activities, such as in case of Alicja Tysiąc, emerge at the intersection of women's health and women's financial situations, they have not been exposed to the critiques of not representing non-middle class women's interest. Alicja Tysiąc case, like the case of 14 year old Agata that I will explore in the last section touched on the question of the legitimacy of the movement in yet another aspect- the ability to mobilize women on behalf of gender social justice.

3. Mass or scattered: Polish feminism and the concept of “political culture”

Social movements play crucial role in the struggle to improve and transform democracy in the post-socialist countries as they are less prone to institutional corruption and the limitations of party politics. Young women socialist, feminist interventions together with the efforts of many NGOs have a greater reformatory potential. They, as Sonia Alvarez argues:

Reach beyond perceived material and institutional gains; to the extent that social movements shake the boundaries of cultural and political representations and social practices, calling into question even what may or may not be seen as political to the extent, finally, that the cultural politics of social movements enact cultural contestations

or presuppose cultural differences-when we must accept that what is at stake for social movements, in a profound way, is a transformation of the dominant political culture in which they have to move and constitute themselves as social actors with political pretensions (Alarez 1998, 8).

Social movements, including feminism, create political culture, practices ,and institutions, “carved out of the totality of social reality that historically comes to be considered as properly political and challenge dominant political culture of new democracies” (Mouffe, 1993, 2) (p. 8). Polish feminism is an example of such social movement’s role as it produces practices and institutions that aim at redefining the concepts of citizenship, democracy, point at the antidemocratic features of the authoritarian and conservative regimes, and demand redefining public and private spaces. Polish feminism changed the mentality of the Polish public and the attitude of many women towards gender issues and social justice. At the level of practice, feminism strikes with a remarkable diversity of practices and strategies that aim at unsettling the dominant political culture. On the other hand, the question that troubles both feminist activists and researchers of social movement’s in Poland is the lack of mass women’s mobilization - a lack of a feminist majority that would emerge out of the feminist struggles. Again, the recent lack of mass women’s mobilization in the face of the outrageous violation of young girls’ rights, have been an impulse for many feminist to wonder: why is there no feminism after communism?

Fourteen year old Agata, from Lublin, became pregnant after being raped by her schoolmate in the early spring of the 2008. She was eight weeks pregnant when she visited a doctor in a search of medical assistance. According to Polish law, she had a right

to a legal abortion, as her pregnancy was the result of the crime - even though she had not complained about her rape to the police. In Polish law, every pregnancy that is the result of the sexual activity involving persons below fifteen years of age is considered a crime. The pregnancy, however, has to be terminated before 12 weeks. The doctor whom Agata visited reported her case to the police, who informed the mother of the girl about the situation. The two, mother and daughter, decided that, considering Agata's age, an abortion is the best option for her. Yet, a local hospital refused to perform the procedure. Moreover, when the head of the gynecology department asked Agata to visit her office, the local priest was waiting for her to convince her not to get an abortion. After the visit the girl was separated from her mother and put into the youth shelter. The head of the gynecology also argued that she would adopt Agata and her baby and take away parental rights from Agata's mother. The prosecutors started the case of taking away Agata's parents legal rights after the right wing group claimed that the parents were forcing Agata to have an abortion. Moreover, as the girls' cell phone number somehow got into the hands of the right wing groups, they started to send her text messages aiming to convince her to change her decision. One of them read: "The defenders of life will help you with everything. Save your little one".

By the time Agata was ten weeks pregnant, her mother decided to ask for help; she contacted the Federation for Women and Family Planning and also complained to the Medical Rights Plenipotentiary. The Federation helped set up the abortion in one of the Warsaw's hospitals. Somehow, however, a right wing group showed up in the hospital and Agata started to receive text messages from "pro-life" activists. Finally, the Polish Minister of Health intervened and found Agata a hospital in Gdansk, where the girl

received the procedure. “Pro-choice” groups and Catholic Church activists claim that the Minister acted against the Catholic ethic and demanded the Catholic authorities excommunicate her from the Church.

Agata’s case may be the first in the 20-year history of the restrictive abortion regulation in Poland that showed clearly and publicly that even in cases allowed by law, an abortion in Poland was virtually unattainable for women. In this case, it would have been impossible without the forceful intervention of a sympathetic state (even though the level of harassment for Agata and her parents was extraordinary). Agata’s case thus was unprecedented in another way: the feminist activists and the government officials worked together publicly to secure a woman’s right to an abortion. It has been a significant event in the light of the history of the governmental refusal to publicly acknowledge any possibility of changing the current abortion law and doubts about the proper functioning of the current abortion law⁴². Agata’s story, widely discussed by the media and the public, has confirmed that the shift in the abortion discourse in Poland has taken place. Agata’s case may be the first case of an abortion so widely discussed by the media and the public. It is also the first case in which the opinion of all: politicians, journalist, human rights activists and the general public concur with feminists’ demands to change the abortion law, or at least to follow the current regulations. Thus we are witnessing the reconfiguration of priorities: the well being of a woman-girl is valued more than the fetus and, more importantly, the well being is considered the responsibility of the government. Moreover, in Agata’s case the unprecedented happen: feminist activists and government

⁴² For instance, over the years, the Federation on Women and Family Planning has been submitting research according to which over 80 000 women have had an illegal-unsafe and costly abortions in Poland each year. Federation data’s disparity in comparison to state numbers (365 abortion a year) has never been addressed by the government officials.

officials worked together publically to secure a woman's rights to an abortion. It has been a significant event in light of the history of the government's refusal to publically acknowledge any doubts about the sufficiency and functioning of the current abortion law. Finally, Agata's story, widely discussed by the media and public, has proven that the shift in the abortion discourse in Poland is taking place. However as Agata's case has illuminated the fact that public opinion does not translate to either wider support for feminist actions, or the mass mobilization of women in defense of their reproductive rights. As feminist activists around the country aimed to use Agata's case to motivate women to take to the streets, only 200 women attended the widely advertised demonstration in front of the Parliament in Warsaw.

Joanna Piotrowska, the head of a feminist bookstore and human rights organization, asked notoriously over the summer on her radio show "Better Later than Never" why women do not follow feminists in their fight for their rights? Why do they not mobilize in the defense of the little rights they already have? Piotrowska and many other feminist activists voiced their disappointment with women's reactions to the Agata's case. For Piotrowska, the passivity of Polish women indicates the weakness of the feminist movement, its inability to reach out to "ordinary women" on the one hand and the intrinsic passivity and disinterest in the public activity of Polish women on the other. Additionally, a question re-emerged, was mass mobilization even possible in the new social/political configuration that has resulted as a consequence of both global processes and local transformations?

In Central and Eastern Europe, feminism represents both the grass-roots women's struggles that often have their genealogies in social and political movements of the region

and intersect with the newly arriving global and transnational discourses that are responsible for the significant dislocation in terms of “gender” discourses and practices (Einhorn 2005). As Barbara Einhorn argues, in the region, the EU, represents globalizing force that also plays a crucial role in the transition from a bipolar to the uni-polar world, dominated by the supranational market economy (Einhorn 2005). The complex and multidirectional mobilization of women in the region challenges a numbers of hegemonic discourses: the nation state neo-conservatism, the patriarchal culture’s sexism, the neo-liberal paradigm of economic reforms, and the institutionalized “gender equality” narrative. Given the particularities of the post-socialist context and the variety of transformation trajectories throughout the region, it is important to pay attention to how hegemonies are challenged and counter-hegemonies are produced.

While globalization leads to the re-conceptualization of the symbolic order, our understanding of identities has shifted from solid and fixed to fluid, flexible, and unbound by the material and symbolic boundaries. In the context of globalization, women’s movements strategies and methods as well as their relationships to the state and international institutions, acquired an ambivalent positionality, represented particularly by feminist NGOs, which I have analyzed in Chapter Two of this work. The NGOs that have represented crucial spaces in which feminism developed since mid-1990s; indicated to some extent the ambivalent and undecided positionality of Polish feminism. While on one hand, many women’s activists have been drawn to neo-liberal discourses, they have been, at the same time, repulsed by the ways in which neo-liberal policies effect women’s lives. These ambivalent attitudes towards liberalism have created a peculiar constellation within the movement in terms of individual and collective feminist identities. First of all,

the division between institutional and informal women's movements has been blurred as personal ties between NGOs and informal groups persist. Secondly, feminist NGOs in Poland have never been fully committed to the liberal agenda, mostly due to their individual members' attachments to radical freedom movements, the Solidarity movement, or pre-war socialist movements that made their commitment to liberal feminism questionable.

As I have argued in Chapter Three, many younger feminists had developed a critique of the existing understanding of the "international" or "global feminist" movements based on the cooperation between international institutions, NGOs, and the state, and proposed the idea of solidarity and coalition (Mohanty 2003). As transnational feminists activists in the context of the Third World, they argued that feminism based on solidarity marks the turn from a focus on policy, rights, and equality towards centering the intersection of various identities that captures many angles and contexts of women's discrimination in various social and geographical locations (Tiberghien 2004, Desai 2005). Such a shift requires a new understanding of social movements, the recognition of both the diversification of movements' activities (local, through national, regional to transnational), and the shifting character of social mobilization from mass to scattered to localized. Moreover, as I have argued in Chapters Five and Six, the consequence of the shift against institutionalized, "translated" feminisms required both facing "the other" in Polish feminism, embodied in the Catholic feminist, and turning to local narratives and trajectories in a search of more contextualized and familiar origins of feminism. As a result, the Polish feminist movement today represents a case of feminism as a "melting pot", where various trajectories, generations, ideologies, and forms of activism are

present and clash and cooperate with each other. But is it a feminist movement or just a new formation of feminism?

In her *Globalization and Feminist Activism* Mary Hawkesworth argues that:

constructing feminism exclusively in social movement terms plays to the media fascination with spectacle, but it has the unsavory effect of making feminism disappear when women are no longer in the streets. Conflating feminism with forms of protests and mass demonstrations sustains a representation of feminism as perpetual outsider. Since such outsider status is fundamentally incompatible with working within the system, feminism is condemned to temporary and fleeing manifestations, for the institutionalization of feminist principles and mobilization within the institutions appear to remain forever beyond reach. Social movement frames also tend to equate feminist success with a form of publicity that secures widespread recognition of a problem. But naming a problem and resolving or eliminating it is quite different things. Thus while the conceptualization of feminism as a social movement highlights one form of feminist activism in certain periods it has a ironic effect of declaring feminism obsolete long before feminist have achieve social transformation they envision” (Hawkesworth 2006, 31).

Alvarez’s, Dagnino’s, and Escobar’s exploration of the Latin American social movement, utilizes a similarly wide definition:

Social movement encompasses more than the movements organizations and their active members; they include occasional participants in movement events, actions, sympathizers, and collaborators in NGOs, political parties, universities, other cultural and conventionally political institutions, the Church and even the state who (at least partially) support given movement’s goals and helps deploy its discourses and demands in and against dominant political cultures and institutions (Landim, 1993, in Alvarez, Escobar, Dagnino 1998)

In both approaches feminism thus is more of a process of becoming fluid and flexible. Feminist activism may be appropriated through various strategies and activism: through theory, street actions etc. The goal of feminism, however, remains the same: to end sexist oppression (hooks 1998). This goal of feminism – ending women's oppression, requires resistance towards the existing social order, the active involvement on behalf of changing it, and the formation of feminists' self identity.

In the contemporary world, social movements emerge predominantly at the outskirts of mainstream politics. Characteristic of the new social formations is the emphasis on culture (the broader, newer understanding of politics) and identity. New social movements are those that are engaged in “new forms of doing politics” and those who contribute to the new form of sociability. In such a context, the Polish feminist movement can be seen as both one that utilizes more conventional strategies of impacting the mainstream, traditional politics, and one that aims at broadening the conception of politics through exploring new hybrid cultural and political identities. In their collection *Cultures of Politics. Politics of Cultures* Sonia Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino and Arturo Escobar propose to conceptualize the idea of social change represented by social movements in Latin America in terms of the transformation of the “political culture” (Alvarez, Escobar, Dagnino 1998). They propose to see both culture and politics as heterogeneous concepts that encompass a variety of ways of life and social practices, produced and reproduced by a variety of actors, occupying mainstream as well as subaltern positions within the society. In Alvarez, Escobar, and Dagnino's understanding, the culture is not static, bound by time and space; rather they propose to

see it as a process - dynamic, interactive and historical (Alvarez, Escobar, Dagninio 1998, 3). Within such definitions of political culture, there is no clear distinction between “us” and “them”, producers and “receivers” of culture, we are all co-creators of the political culture, even as their political positions are marginalized and/or excluded from mainstream politics. Alvarez, Escobar, Dagnino see cultural politics as a result of discursive articulations originating in existing cultural practices. Not only is the context in which political culture emerges important, but so is the political culture, in such a conceptualization – to the same degree, the “property” of the existing political elites (parties, churches, corporations) and its seeming outsiders (grassroots organizations, *queers* and feminists). It is thus never what it seems to be, it is never pure, but always hybrid. Positionality of the individual and collective identities within the power structure is, however, crucial for their relationship of the political status quo - acceptance or contestations of the existing values and norms of the “political culture”. Jordan and Weedon argue:

The legitimation of social relations of inequality, and the struggle to transform them, are central concerns of CULTURAL POLITICS. Cultural politics fundamentally determine the meanings of social practices and moreover, which groups and individuals have the power to definite the meanings. Cultural politics are also concerned with subjectivity and identity, since culture plays a central role in constituting our sense of ourselves... The form of subjectivity that we inhabit play crucial part in determining whether we accept or contest existing power relations. Moreover, for marginalized and oppresses groups the construction of new and resistant identities is a key dimension of a wider political struggle to transform society (1995, 5-6)

Like in Latin America, in Central and Eastern Europe, in the context of post-communism, the levels of poverty, discrimination, and exclusion indicate that the quality of the “new” democracies is far different from what has been expected before the transformation. Poland, like many Latin American countries, represents the paradoxical situation in which the political culture is, on the one hand, very much influenced by the western democracies, while on the other, it is exposed to the strong impact of religion and conservative forces. Moreover, like in many Latin American countries, the liberal principles to which political elites have been drawn since before the transformation, are often in complex alliances with the political principles that are responsible for the exclusion and oppression in these very conservative societies. In Poland, the current ruling party, the Civic Platform, is a perfect example of such a combination. While it is devoted to capitalism and economic liberalism, it maintains its support of the conservative social order, and its alliance with the Catholic Church. In the context of Latin America, the argument of the façade character of the democracy is often put forward as many authors argue that the “democratic” system has been imposed on the prevailing historic hierarchical structures that see politics as a playground for the political elites.

At the same time, many feminist organizations made a conscious decision not to undermine liberal discourses altogether, partially because of their rejection of the socialist past. In the case of feminism, the possibility to impact cultural politics means both the infusion of feminist ideas into the social membranes, and the broadening of feminist discourse; going beyond the narrowly defined politics on the one hand and facing issues such as emotion and conflict within the movement on the other. How the collective

feminist action responds to the existence of Catholic feminism and how the newly emerged “patriotic” feminist discourses bring up the question of *queer* subjects in feminism is the subject of the Chapters Four and Five of this dissertation. These two aspects of feminist identities, Catholic and “patriotic,” symbolize a strong engagement with issues central to the mainstream political culture. Feminists approach questions of Catholicism and nationalism from the subaltern positions of the religious feminists and sexual strangers. This allows questions of “race”, “class”, sexuality”, rarely addressed in Poland, to surface within the public sphere – both mainstream and feminist.

My research on Polish feminist identities has proven, following Mary Hawkesworth that “singular” feminism is in fact impossible (Hawkesworth 2006, 25). The conception of social justice represented by feminists in Poland requires not only a change in politics and the policymaking but also a wide range of social and cultural practices. It thus needs to employ the complex definition of politics and public sphere as working at a variety of scales, related to multiple dimensions. The struggle for a more democratic social order thus requires not only the focus on the strictly defined “political” but also the “resignification” of the very notions of citizenship, political representation, participation, and democracy itself. Such a conception of politics requires feminism not to be limited to certain activities, such as voting and campaigning, but expanding on other activities and spheres of social life such as social and cultural. It demands the acknowledgment of the impossibility of a universal women’s interest and the mass movement that would represent it.

At the supranational level, my analysis destabilizes the binary contextualization of the map of global feminism and proves that every movement has its own dynamic, and

the debates and issues important in one context cannot be simply translated to another. In Poland, the hegemony of the liberal feminism has thus to be seen as one of the elements of the feminist trajectory, neither a crucial nor a single point of reference. Similarly the discourses on Third World feminism, while useful in the context of the Second World are unable to capture a variety of feminist trajectories and traditions in the region. Once again we have to acknowledge the plurality of feminism. Neither frameworks can capture the hybrid feminist identities that emerge in Poland: those conceptualized in the east or in the west. They may seem odd and ambivalent in other locations; they do however “make” sense in Poland.

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Appendix 1. Calendar of the events

1983

The first feminist seminar at the Department of Sociology at Warsaw University (Professor Renata Siemienska)

1984

The first women's consciousness-raising group starts to meet at the Warsaw University

1986

"Women's Cinema"- the women's filmmakers festival features 60 movies directed by women from around the world, at the Warsaw student's club "Hybrydy"

1987

"To be a Woman? The first March Feminist Session is organized in Krakow at the Jagiellonian University

1988

"Women's Place in the patriarchal culture" the Second March Session takes place in Krakow

1989

Women protest the attempts to change the abortion law. Demonstrations take place in Warsaw, Krakow, Lodz, Poznan, Bydgoszcz and Wroclaw.

"Women's Club", the "Movement for the Defense of Women's Rights" and the "Self Defense Movement for women's dignity" are created in Poznan and Torun

The Polish Feminist Association is being register

The "Pro-Femina" Association is being created in Warsaw

The Solidarity's "women's section" has been created in Gdansk

The "First Black Ribbon March" against violence against women has been organized entirely for and by men in Krakow

1990

The Third March Session "Motherhood as a choice and the social obligation" is being organized by the Jagiellonian University students

Registration of the "NEUTRUM" the Association for the Neutrality of the State

1991

Registration of EFKa- Women's Foundation in Warsaw

Women's demonstrations against the attempts to change the abortion law take place in Warsaw between January and May

Solidarity's "women's section" has been liquidated

The Fourth March Session "Witches- myths and reality" has been organized in Krakow

The Parliamentary Group of Women has been created in Sejm (and the NGOs forum?)

1992

Fifth March Session "Motherhood and sexuality-The new women's identity" has been organized in Krakow by EFKa

The Federation on Women and Family Planning has been registered

The Research Center for Women has been established at Lodz University

1993

The informal group "Women Too" has been established in Warsaw

The Stefan Batory's (Soros Foundation) Women's Program starts its activities in Warsaw

Sixth March Session "Women's Participation in the public life: Politics, labor market and media" has been organized in Krakow by EFKa

First Issue of "In the Full Voice" feminist periodical has been published by EFKa

Center for Women's Promotion has been registered in Warsaw

The interdisciplinary seminar "Women's Studies" takes place at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan

First edition of the "Women's Initiatives and organizations in Poland" has been published by Center for Women's Promotion

The Women's Center is established as a part of Polish Feminist Association

1994

Seventh March Session "Power and Gender" has been organized in Krakow by EFKa

The Social Committee of the non-governmental organizations has been established as a body to create the Alternative Report for the Beijing Conference

The First issue of "Feminist Meetings" the periodical by Polish Feminist Association has been published

The "Mother Boles" zin is been published in Krakow

1995

Humane Birth Giving Foundation has been registered in Warsaw

Women's Rights Center has been registered in Warsaw

The Women's Center has been created as a part of EFKa

The conference "Violence in the Family" has been organized by EFKa

The First Tribunal Against Violence Against Women' has been organized by Women's Rights Center in Warsaw

1996

La Strada Foundation has been registered in Warsaw

The March Session devoted to the condition of Women's Movement in Poland has been organized by EFKa

Walpurgis Night-the festival organized by the Emancypunx

OSKa Foundation, Women's Information Center has been registered in Warsaw

The Gender Studies at Warsaw University has been created

The conference "History and presence of the feminist thought in the philosophical perspective" has been organized in Gdansk

Ola-Archiwum, National Archive for Lesbians, is been established in Warsaw

First issues of OSKa's Calendar of Events

1997

First issue of OSKa Bulletin has been published

The Association for the Gender Equal Status Beijing 1995 has been registered in Warsaw

First "Feminist Meetings" organized by Konsola take place in Poznan

Fist issue of "First Fury" has been published by Ola Archiwum

The conference "100 years of Women at Polish Universities" has been organized in Krakow

1998

2nd Meeting of the feminist groups "Various Faces of Feminism" has been organized in Poznan by Konsola

1st National Women's Conference " Government Politics on Women" is organized in Warsaw by OSKa

“Feminine Mystique” Conference is organized in Krakow by EFKa

The internet discussion list “Gender” has been created by EFKa

Women’s organizations protest against the government’s approach the negotiation of the chapter 13 of the accession treaty to EU

“Take Back the Night” march is organized by Emancypunx, in Warsaw, Poznan and Wroclaw

1999

3rd Meeting of the Women’s groups “Construction of the Women’s Identity” organizes in Poznan by Konsola

2nd Annual OSKa’s Conference “Government’s Politics on Women is devoted to the accession to the EU

1st Feminist Summer School is organized by OSKa and Gender Studies in Warsaw under the title “Let’s make sense of our femininity”

Konsola Association has been registered in Poznan

1st issue of “Zadra”, feminist periodical published by EFKa

NEWW Polska is registered in Gdansk

2000

Women’s NGOs report on the realization of the Beijing Platform by the Polish government

8 March Women’s Agreement is being created as a reaction to the police prosecution of the doctor and patient engaged in the illegal abortion

8 March Manifa, feminist demonstration has been organized in Warsaw under the slogan “Free Women, Free World!” and “Democracy without Women is Half-Democracy!”

EFKa organizes the conference “Feminism and Ecology”

Women’s NGOs present the Alternative Report “Women 200” at the UN Forum as a protest against the presentation of Polish government officials

4th Meeting of the women’s groups “Women amongst Women” is organized in Poznan”

2nd Feminist Summer School is organized by OSKa and gender Studies in Warsaw under the title “Feminism is getting stronger”

Federation on Women and Family Planning publishes the alternative report on the realization on the abortion law in Plans. According to the Federation data 80 thousand abortions have been performed in Poland in 1999, comparing to 365 official government statistics.

Women’s organizations protest against the inaccurate presentation of the EU gender politics in the official government publications

The conference ‘Cinderella in the social network and social human and erotic games on identity, power knowledge and beauty’ has been organized in Gdansk

8 March Women’s Agreement organizes a street demonstration “Women’s Rights are Human Rights” and “Women’s Freedom” as a part of the International Human Rights Day in Warsaw

“Law and Gender”, first issue of the Center for Women’s Rights Periodical has been published

2001

The first issue of “Katedra”, the Gender Studies periodical is published in Warsaw

KARAT Coalition has been registered as an international organization in Poland

Pre-election Women’s Coalition has been created

8 March Women's Agreement organizes a Manifa street demonstration, under the slogans "Don't let you mouth shout with garbage"

5th Meeting of women's organizations "Women in Popular Culture is organized by Konsola in Poznan

The first issue of "Artmix" and internet periodical devoted to feminist art has been published

4th OSKa's National Conference "The Future Government Politics on Women" has been organized in Warsaw

Mia100 Kobiet festival has been organized in Warsaw

The Wen-Do trainings for Polish trainers starts in Krakow organized by EFKa

Women's Tribunal on Abortion is organized in Warsaw by Federation of Women and Family Planning

Postgraduate Gender Studies program starts at Jagiellonian University

2002

100 Women's Letter to European Parliament against the no following of the abortion law in Poland

8 March Women's Agreement organizes Manifa under the slogan "My Life, My choice"

6th Meeting of Women's Groups "in a search for a Little Girl is organized by Konsola in Poznan

5th OSKa's conference "Local government politics on women" is organized in Warsaw

1st women's camp for women Feminist Action for Information and recreation is organized by Ulica Siostrzana

3rd Summer School of feminism is organized by OSKa and Viadrina University in Frankfurt under the title "Women and Girls have eyes wide open"

Gender Studies groups has been created at Gdansk University

2003

8 March Agreement Organizes Manifa, street feminist demonstration "Out bodies, our life our rights" in Warsaw

7th Meeting of women's groups "Violence against women, women against violence" is organized by Konsola in Poznan

Boat-abortion critique "Women on waves" visit Poland for an invitation of the STER Committee, consisting on women's feminist organizations

2nd feminist camp FAIR is organized by Ulica Siostrzana

OSKa Foundation protests against the sexist radio campaign

4th Feminist Summer School organized by OSKa and Gender Studies under title "Women exercise Wen-Do"

Women's organizations protest against the liquidation of the Alimony Fund

The Association –Self reliable Mothers, the responsible Parent is established

2004

The Polish Women's Lobby has been created as a part of the European Women's Lobby Women's Manifa are taking place in Warsaw, Gdansk, Wroclaw, and Poznan. In Warsaw the slogan of the Manifa is "Girl we need deeds!"

The Literary gender group is been established at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan

8th Meeting of the feminist groups "Feminism and media" is being organized by Konsola in Poznan

3rd feminist cam Feminist Summer Action is organized by Ulica Siostrzana
Lesbian Agreement is been created

2005

Feminist Manifa are organized in Warsaw, Krakow, Wroclaw and Poznan by 8 March
Women's Agreement and lesbian Agreement

OSKary the awards for feminist of the year are being organized by OSKa in Warsaw

9th Meeting of women's groups " Women in religions. Presence not only silence" is
organized in Poznan by Konsola

"My Life, My Choice" poster competition and action is organized by Federation on
Women and Family Planning

4th feminist camp is organized by Ulica Siostrzana

Illegal Equality March in Poznan (The March was banned by the president of Poznan,
whose decision was later recognized as illegal by the court)

The informal group pro-choice has been created

2006

Fight Together! Be Free! Defend Your Rights, 2000 people participated in the "8th March
Manifa" in Warsaw. Manifa has been organized by Women's Agreement and Lesbian
Agreement. The special "Kids section" has been the part of the demonstration for the first
time. Manifa have also took place in Krakow, Gdańsk, Sopot, Szczecin Lodz, Poznan
Opole and Katowice

March for Tolernace in Krakow

10 000 people participate in the Equality Parade in Warsaw

Mama Foundation has been created in Warsaw

European Tribunal of Human Rights accepts the Alicja Tysiac's case for consideration

Beginning of "Our Case" action; Agnieszka Kraska, Yga Kostrzwa, Sandra Rutkiewicz
and Joanna Renigier, Four lesbian activist sue the right wing politicians for the
discriminatory rhetoric

"Oh Mamma Mia! I cannot make it here with the stroller!" Mama Foundation action
against the obstacles for the strollers in the cities

Federation on Women and Family Planning and other women's organizations protest
against the further restriction of the existing abortion law.

"I had an abortion" street action organized by informal group "Pro-Choice"

2007

3000 people participated in the "Great March of Women's Solidarity" Manifa 2007 in
Warsaw.

Ladyfest in Torun

Women's and Lesbian/Gay organizations protest against homophobic of the Polish
Minister of Education

Women's organizations protest against Parliament's attempts to change Constitution and
add the restrictive anti-choice

Alicja Tysiac wins the case against the Polis state in the European Tribunal of Human
Rights (Tysiac was denied legal abortion)

Women's organizations support the White Village of the 10000 nurses who came to
Warsaw to protest their minimal wages in front of the Parliament

Fifth feminist camp FAL has been organized by Ulica Siostrzana

"Strollers Critical Mass" demonstration of mothers in Warsaw

Appendix 2

STATEMENT FROM NON-REGION

Countries in Transition in ECE Region

East-East European Caucus

Plenary Session of the IV World Conference on Women

September 13, 1995

Beijing

Presented by Wanda Nowicka,

Federation for Women and Family Planning, Poland

Our special gratitude goes to Baha'i international community for giving us their spot at the Plenary Session of the IV World Conference on Women

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. This Statement is from the Non-Region represented here at the Fourth World Conference on Women. Our group of countries is a Non-Region because there is no recognizable political or geographic definition for the region composed of countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union .

We are bound by the common problems associated with the transition to democracy. In this difficult and uneven transition, the most serious problem is the consistent and drastic decline in the status of women.

The Governments have failed to incorporate the needs and interests of women in their reforms. For example, women face problems with unemployment, trafficking in women and increased violence. Many women have been forced from their home as refugees from war. In addition, environmental disasters such as Chernobyl have a significant impact on women. This decline in the status of women in our region negatively impacts progress in the world community.

This transition has also created many new opportunities for women. Notably, for the first time in the history of the United Nations, we, as independent NGOs from this region are able to speak for ourselves. I am able to speak to you today because more than 400 women representing more than 80 NGOs from 19 countries came together to articulate the concerns of women of the region. The efforts of our caucus, called East European Caucus, reflect work that began in Bratislava , Vienna , New York and the Beijing Express Train from Warsaw to Beijing .

The East European Caucus met in Huairou and analyzed the Beijing Platform for Action. We developed specific recommendations and lobbying strategies to reflect our concerns. The East European Caucus recognizes that the Platform for Action includes many issues important to the region; however, we have some reservations about the document. Unfortunately, we were not involved in drafting in the early stages of the process and believe that the description of the impact of the transition to democracy on women is inadequate.

For example, we disagree with the description of the feminization of poverty as a short-term consequence of the process of political, economic and social transformation (paragraph 50). Describing the problem as short-term minimizes the seriousness of the problem and ignores the long-term impact on the women in our countries.

We are also seriously concerned about the description in paragraph 17 that the transition to parliamentary democracy has been rapid and relatively peaceful. In most countries the changes have not been peaceful or rapid. In fact, we have witnessed more than 20 armed conflicts in the region.

We also disagree with the analysis of reproductive health issues for the countries in transition in paragraph 98. The most pressing concern for women in our region is the restriction or threatened restriction on the right to legal and accessible abortion. Despite these concerns, we believe that the Platform for Action can be a powerful tool for change in our region. We urge all nations to consider the particular conditions of women in our region in implementing the Platform.

We also urge our Governments to develop a plan for regional cooperation and allocate appropriate resources to improvement the recommendations in the Platform. We commit our work with our governments and the international community to achieve the se goals. Through this process, we hope to transform our Non-Region into a recognizable Region.

Curriculum Vita
Magdalena Grabowska

1. CURRENT POSITIONS:

- 2009 **ASSISTANT PROFESSOR IN TRANSNATIONAL FEMINISMS**, Women's and Gender Studies Program, The College of New Jersey (courses: Transnational Feminisms, Women, Culture and Society)
- 2009 **VISITING LECTURER**, Gender Studies, Warsaw University (course: Polish Feminism Between East and West)
- 2007 **RESEARCH ASSISTANT** NSF funded research *Forced Migrants Living in Post-conflict situations" Social networks and Livelihood Strategies* conducted in Georgia,

2. EDUCATION:

- 2009-2003 **PH.D** Department of, Rutgers University, Women and Gender Studies (Dissertation topic: Polish feminism between East and West. The formation of Polish women's movement identities)
- 2000-2002 **PH.D.** student, Graduate School for Social Research, Polish Academy of Science, Warsaw, Poland.
- 1995-2000 **MA**, Department of Sociology, Warsaw University (Dissertation topic: Minimalism, Maximalism in Feminists Political Philosophy).

OTHER POSITIONS:

- 2008 **TEACHING ASSISTANT**, Department of Women's and Gender Studies, Rutgers University, (courses: Women, Culture and Society, Feminist Practices)
- 2007 **TEACHING ASSISTANT**, Women's and Gender Studies Department, Rutgers University (course: Internship in Women's and Gender Studies).
- 2006-2007 **GRADUATE FELLOW**, Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis, Rutgers University.
- 2006-2007 **PROJECT COORDINATOR**, Institute for Women's Leadership, Rutgers University (project: Gender and Public Policy Making).
- 2006 **INSTRUCTOR**, Department of Geography, Rutgers University (course: Geography of Europe).
- 2002-2005 **GRADUATE ASSISTANT**, NSF funded research: Constructing Supranational Political Spaces: The European Union, Eastern Enlargement and Women's Agency.
- 2000-2001 **PROJECT COORDINATOR**, OSKa- National Women's Information Center, Warsaw, Poland.
- 2000-2001 **RESEARCHER**, Federation on Women and Family Planning,

Warsaw, Poland.

PUBLICATIONS:

- “Redefining well-being through actions: women’s activism and the Polish state” (with Joanna Regulska) in: *Transforming Gendered Well-Being: The Impact of social movements*, Jean-Michel Bonvin, Mercè RenAlison E. Woodward (eds.) (upcoming in 2010, Ashgate Press).
- “Social Justice, Hegemony and Women’s Mobilizations” (with Joanna Regulska), in: *Hegemony and Social Movements: Views from East/Central Europe and Eurasia*, Jan Kubik, (ed.), (upcoming in 2009 Columbia University Press)
- “Tożsamość polskiego feminizmu w świetle transnarodowych debat” (“Polish Feminist Identities and Transnational Feminism”), in: *Kobiety, Feminizm, Demokracja (Women, Feminism, Democracy)* Bogusława Budrowska, (ed.), Polish Academy of Sciences Press (upcoming in 2009, PAN)
- *Współpraca czy Konflikt, Unia Europejska, Państwo i kobiety (Cooperation or Conflict? State, The European Union and Women)* with Małgorzata Fuszara, Joanna Mizielinska and Joanna Regulska, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, 2009.
- “Will it make a difference? EU Enlargement and Women’s Public Discourse in Poland” (with Joanna Regulska), in *Gender Politics in the Expanding European Union. Mobilization, Inclusion, Exclusion*, Silke Roth, (ed.) Oxford, UK: Berghahn Books, 2008.
- “New Geographies of Women’s Subjectivities in Poland”, (with Joanna Regulska) in: *Global Babel: Interdisciplinarity, Transnationalism and the Discourses of Globalization*, Margueritte Murphy and Samir. Dayal (eds.) Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007.
- “Kobiety w wyborach do Parlamentu Europejskiego” (“Women in European Parliament elections”) in: *Polityka i Plec (Gender and Politics)* Agnieszka. Grzybek, Joanna. Piotrowska (eds.), Warszawa: Fundacja Heinricha Bolla, 2006.
- *W drodze do Unii Europejskiej. Przewodniczka nie tylko dla Kobiet (On the way to the European Union. A guide not only for women)* (with Agata Teutsch), Warszawa: Fundacja im H. Bolla, 2002,
- “Euroceptyczki i euroentuzjastki” (Euroceptics and Euroenthusiasts), in: *OSKa* 3(16), 2000, 20-34. “Czy współczesna demokracja winna jest kobietom parytet?” (Does Contemporary Democracy Owe Women a Parity?) in: *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, 2 (12): 2001, 323-328.
- “Attitudes of Rural Women Toward Reproduction Issues”, (with Wanda Nowicka) in: *The anti-abortion law in Poland. The Functioning and Social Effects* Warsaw: Federacja na Rzecz Kobiet i Planowania Rodziny, 2000.
- *Niezbędnik Europejski dla Kobiet (European Union’s Manual for Women)*, (with Agata Teutsch), Warszawa: Fundacja Heinricha Bolla, 2000.

PAPERS PRESENTED AT THE SEMINARS AND CONFERENCES:

- **2009** “Secularity, Spirituality and Difference: Polish feminists on sexuality and political identity”, 7th European Feminist Research Conference, Utrecht (June)

- **2009** “Second World? Global gender discourses and local post-socialist legacies in Poland and Georgia”, Feminist Critical Analysis Seminar, Inter-University Center, Dubrovnik (May)
- **2009** “Bringing the Second World In. Polish feminism between East and West”, National Convention of American Women in Slavic Studies, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio (April)
- **2009** “European Parliament- A chance for Women?”, Henrich Boll Foundation panel, Warsaw (March)
- **2009** (with Joanna Regulska) “Feminisms of *Second World*: Production of new women’s identities in Poland”, European Conference on Politics and Gender, Belfast (January)
- **2008** “Transnational Academia and Everyday Feminist Politics in Poland”, 40th National Convention of American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Philadelphia (November)
- **2008** (with Joanna Regulska) “Gendered Meaning of Displacement”, Forum on Displacement in Georgia: Human Impact, Policy Implications, and Lessons Learned Harriman Institute, Columbia University, New York (October).
- **2008** (with Joanna Regulska) “European Union and the transformation of the Polish feminist movement”, Pan-European Conference, Riga, (September)
- **2008** “Political Catholicism, Religion, Spirituality and the Polish feminist movement”, Gender and Transition Workshop, New York University, New York (June)
- **2007** “Genealogy of Polish Feminist Movement”, Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis, New Brunswick (March).
- **2006** “In the Search for the New Identity: Polish feminism in the context of the transnational feminist debates”, Polish Academy of Science seminar “Women, Gender, Democracy” (May).
- **2005** “Cooperation, Coalition Conflict. Strategies of participation and contraction of political spaces by women organizations in the process of EU Enlargement” Polish Academy of Science seminar “Women, Gender, Democracy” (June)
- **2005** “Gender Gap. On some paradoxes of Eastern Enlargement”, Second Pan-European Conference on EU Politics, Bologna, Italy (June)
- **2005** “Central Eastern European feminism between East and West”, European Gender Cluster seminar, Rutgers University, New Brunswick (December)
- **2003** (with Joanna Regulska) “New Geographies of Polish Women Identities”, Gender and Power in the New Europe, Lund University, Lund (August)
- **2003** “New Geographies of Polish Women Identities” at American Association of Geographers Annual Conference, New Orleans (March)
- **2002** “Women’s Issues in Czech Republic, Poland and Kyrgyzstan”, Gender in Transition Workshop, New York University, New York (October)

FELLOWSHIPS:

- 2006-2007 Graduate Fellowship, Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis, Rutgers University
- 2001-2002 Doctoral Research Fellowship, Graduate School for Social Research, Polish Academy of Sciences.

- 2002 Summer University Fellowship, Central European University, Budapest

OTHER ACTIVITIES:

- 2008 Member, American Women in Slavic Studies, American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies
- 2001 Member, Sisterhood Street