

**ANTAGONISMS, ALLIANCES AND FRIENDSHIPS:
RELIGIOUS AND SEXUAL POLITICS IN THE POLISH
PUBLIC SPHERE**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is about conflict in the Polish public sphere. It investigates a recent wave of tensions around religious and sexual politics through two case studies: the first looking at mosque constructions and the second at abortion politics in Warsaw. The study is informed by three interconnected theoretical strands: Conflict and the Public Sphere, Secularism and Post-secularism, and Postcolonial theory in a Central and Eastern European context.

Mixed qualitative methods were employed during a year-long fieldwork in Warsaw between 2011-2012. These comprised of interviews, focus groups and participant observations with 72 participants from secular, Muslim, feminist and Catholic groups.

The thesis puts forward questions about how religious and sexual politics are mobilised in public spaces, to what extent the groups involved rely on secular narratives, how imagined categories of the West and Central and Eastern Europe are constituted, and finally, what possibilities there are to surmount antagonisms and foster alliances between the conflicting groups. With that, the study aims to contribute to geographies of religion and post-colonial geographies, furthering knowledge of the often neglected region of Central and Eastern Europe. The findings of this thesis evidence that there has been a shift in the way tensions around religious and sexual politics are mobilised in public spaces, with a heavy reliance on, on the one hand Western liberal secularism and on the other hand Catholic nationalism. The study engages critically with these categories to channel a broader discussion of the transformative possibilities of thinking differently about antagonisms among these groups in Poland.

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GLOSSARY

Azan: Islamic call to prayer.

Hijab: I use the term hijab as related to a piece of material worn by Muslim women in different ways and for different reasons. In academia the hijab is often referred to as: the veil, Islamic veil, headscarf, niqab, burqa and it is often used interchangeably and sometimes incorrectly. These terms will be used when referring to specific types of hijab. The term ‘the veil’ is mainly used when drawing from scholarship that directly references it.

Hadith: The Hadith, or ahadith in its plural form, are sayings of the Prophet traced through a genealogy of reliable sources.

Minaret: In this thesis minaret refers to the tower that is part of a mosque.

PRL: This is another name for the **Communist** system in Poland and means Polska Republika Ludowa (Polish People Republic).

Quran/Qur’an: The Quran is the word of God, according to the Islamic faith. In its physicality, the Quran is presented in a written form and includes several translations. The translations used in this thesis are by Tarif Khalidi and Laleh Bakhtiar.

Secularism: I use secularism as referring to a political and cultural doctrine that demands the distinction between the sacred and the secular where religion is located in the private sphere.

Solidarność [Solidarity]: The opposition movement that formed in 1980 against Communist rule in Poland. The leading figure of *Solidarność* was Lech Wałęsa.

Ummah: Stems from Arabic and refers to ‘community’. In this thesis I use the word to refer specifically to the notion of a Muslim community.

CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

In a pluralist democracy disagreements are not only legitimate but necessary.

Chantal Mouffe (2013:xi)

Why, then, do we idealise the public sphere as a place of full agreement and free of rhetoric? Why aren't we content to hope that it will be a place where disagreements and disappointments will be ideally treated?

Danielle Allen (2004:63)

Within an ideal understanding of a consensual public sphere, most saliently formulated by Jürgen Habermas (1991), conflict is understood to be something best eliminated through universal consensus arrived at by rational deliberation. The quotes opening this chapter challenge that view, encouraging a critical reading of conflicts in the public sphere. This thesis looks towards two of the most prominent tensions currently playing out in the public sphere in Poland.

Since 1989, Poland has undergone a political and economic transition from Communism to liberal democracy and adopted a free-market economy. Complex group tensions have unfolded as a result of the (re)making of a 'new Poland' (Kulpa 2012). Over the last 25 years divides have deepened between previously conflicting groups, and old political alliances particularly those between the Church and the secular left formed in the quest to overthrow an oppressive Communist regime have disintegrated (Kozłowska 2012). Today these political friendships, once unique and celebrated, are much missed in the conflicts between religious and sexual politics that are at the core of Polish antagonisms in the public sphere.

A few months prior to commencing this PhD, I was on my way to Poland for Easter. It was the month of the fatal plane crash that killed the then President of the right-wing Law and Justice Party, Lech Kaczyński, together with many other key politicians. In front of the Presidential Palace, a cross was raised in commemoration of the national tragedy. Soon, the site was transformed into a space of conflict where Catholic groups and anti-clerical groups clashed. Long brewing tensions around the public place of religion in Poland surfaced in the wake of this national tragedy. These events catalysed the formation of the anti-clerical party, the Palikot

Movement¹. This pivotal moment in the recent history of conflict in the Polish public sphere concerned mainly the tension between Catholic and secularist groups with issues of sexual politics at its core. Yet the secularist tensions in the public sphere also rubbed off onto other religious claims to public space. Only a few weeks prior to the cross controversy, Warsaw witnessed its first anti-mosque demonstration where secular liberal groups, far-right groups and internationally mobilised Islamophobes came together at the construction site of the first purpose-built mosque in Warsaw.

By the time my fieldwork for this thesis started, conflicts around sexual and religious politics had become more antagonistic. The public place of Islam was still being contested and at the time of my fieldwork - a second mosque construction project had been proposed. Simultaneously the anti-clerical Palikot Movement had become the third largest party in the 2011 national elections. Mobilised by the rapidly changing political climate, pro-choice feminists and pro-life Catholics proposed two competing citizen's initiatives; one to legalise abortion and the other to further criminalise it. The observations of these complex conflicts and the curious group alliances that emerge from them, played out at this seemingly pivotal moment in the turbulent Polish public sphere, is where this study begins.

CASE STUDIES

The first case study concerns Poland's small Muslim minority. It looks at the recent escalation of anti-Muslim discourse in the Polish public sphere. While the issue is pertinent across the country my study focuses on the Muslim population of Warsaw² and its recent mosque construction projects. This conflict reveals tensions between Muslim, Catholic and secularist groups and that have given rise to complex and troublesome alliances.

The second case study concerns sexual politics mobilised through tensions around abortion. This is a conflict dating back to the democratic transition from Communism when abortion was criminalised. The case study explores the relationship between pro-choice groups campaigning for the reinstatement of the

¹ At the time of writing the party is called *Twoj Ruch [Your Movement]*

² estimated to around 10 000 Muslims

right to legal abortion and pro-life groups campaigning for further legal restrictions on abortion.

RESEARCH AIMS AND QUESTIONS

The overarching aim of this study is to understand, explore and critically engage with group conflict over religious and sexual politics in Poland. Specifically it aims:

1. To collect an original body of knowledge about conflicts in the public sphere over religious and sexual politics.
2. To contribute to recent debates in the field of geographies of religion, secularism and post-secularism
3. To understand tensions in Poland through a post-colonial perspective to critically approach Western/Central and Eastern European power imbalances and knowledge production.
4. To contribute to methodological debates around positionality and work across conflicting groups.

These aims are addressed through the two case studies in Poland with the following key research questions:

- a. How are conflicts over religious and sexual politics played out in and through public space?
- b. How do groups in conflict mobilise religious and secular narratives?
- c. How are antagonisms between the groups in Warsaw fostered?
- d. How are alliances and political friendships mobilised between groups?
- e. How do participants mobilise the wider geographies of Western Europe and Central and Eastern Europe?

THESIS STRUCTURE

This thesis is divided into ten chapters; three chapters constitute *Part I* and are devoted to introducing the thesis (this chapter), its theoretical framework **Chapter 2**, and its methodological foundations **Chapter 3**.

Part II is the mosque case study. It opens by ‘Situating the Context’ of Islam in Poland. This is followed by **Chapter 4** ‘A calling for a place’ which maps the opposition against the mosque constructions as material and symbolic spaces. **Chapter 5** ‘Strange Allies?’ then interrogates the role that the feminist agenda plays in anti-Muslim mosque politics in Warsaw. Finally **Chapter 6** ‘Spaces of Tension, Spaces of Hope’ rounds off the case study with a discussion of the secularist and Catholic narratives around mosques, Muslims and Islam.

Part III is the abortion case study. It opens by ‘Situating the context’ introducing the abortion case study in the context of post-Communist Poland. This is followed by **Chapter 7** ‘Precarious Presence’ which explores the different ways in which pro-life and pro-choice groups occupy public space. **Chapter 8**: ‘Abortion and *Matka Polka*’ discusses the central roles of Catholicism and Polish national identity in the abortion debate. Finally **Chapter 9**: ‘Abortion politics and the West’ then looks at sexual politics and transnational alliances rounding off the second case study.

The **Conclusion** brings together the key themes and findings from the two case studies to make a broader argument about antagonisms, alliances and political friendships in conflicts around the religious and the secular in the Warsaw public sphere.

CHAPTER 2.

THEORETICAL POSITIONING

INTRODUCTION

This chapter establishes the theoretical positioning of this thesis. It lays the foundations upon which the broader debates in the forthcoming chapters rest. I draw on three separate but intersecting sets of literatures that connect my two case studies within an overarching theoretical framework:

1. Conflict and the Public Sphere
2. Geographies of Religion, Secularism and Post-secularism
3. Postcolonial theory in a Central and Eastern European context

CONFLICT, AGONISM AND FRIENDSHIP IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

The thesis' key tenants are conflict and the public sphere. These two key concepts will be unpacked in the following sections using the theoretical insights of Jürgen Habermas (1991) Chantal Mouffe (2005, 2013) and Danielle Allen (2006). I combine the work of Mouffe and Allen to provide a framework from which I critically engage with conflicts in the public sphere. Although neither Mouffe nor Allen engage in debates around religion and secularism, I develop their ideas in thinking critically about the secular public sphere.

CRITIQUING JÜRGEN HABERMAS AND THE UNIVERSAL CONSENSUS

Habermas (1991) is a key theorist dealing with the rise of the public sphere in early modern Europe. His significant theoretical insights into the conceptualisation of the public sphere and conflict, as well as religion, though far from uncritically endorsed in my research, provides a necessary foundation around which to structure the discussions in the forthcoming chapters. Habermas' thinking regarding conflict has at its heart a model of deliberative democracy (C. Calhoun 1992). To him, the public sphere comprises of private individuals governing themselves through rational deliberation over common concerns and reaching conclusions relevant to all (Habermas 1991). Key to this rather idealised view of the public sphere is universality and agreement. Just as the 18th century coffeehouses excluded all but the male bourgeoisie, today's public spaces also exclude certain social groups.

Habermas' theory has been criticised for implicitly promoting exclusive spaces (Fraser 1990; Benhabib 1992; Young 2000; Mitchell 2003)

This Habermasian view negates antagonisms in favour of universalisation and as Mouffe (2005) argues, looks at conflicts through the idea of consensus where reconciliation of contested values is pitted as an ideal model of democratic coexistence in the public sphere. Other notable liberal thinkers such as John Rawls and Hannah Arendt have proposed similar ideas (Honig 1993; Zerilli 2005). These theorists each understand the public sphere as a space of consensus resulting from rational deliberation, though they may differ in their conceptualisation of consensus (Mouffe 2005). Where Arendt emphasises persuasion as the key feature of reaching consensus, Habermas stresses logical proofs (Zerilli 2005). According to Zerilli (2005), Hannah Arendt recognises the importance of ongoing contestation, yet for Mouffe (2013), Arendt's reading of contestation is limited due to a lack of acknowledgement of the role of hegemony. Viewing the public sphere as a neutral and empty space is a mistake, she argues, since it is shaped and continuously reshaped by power relations (Mouffe 2005, Mouffe 2013).

This critique is a crucial argument in my thesis and underpins my critical engagement with the Habermasian notion of the public sphere. A questioning of the 'nakedness'³ of the public sphere, particularly in the context of Poland, is central to my work.

CHANTAL MOUFFE AND AGONISM

Chantal Mouffe (2005, 2013) provides a radical reading of conflict in the public sphere. Arguing against Habermas' universalistic conception of ideal agreement, she calls for the recognition of conflict as an inherent part of a pluralistic society. For Mouffe who understands the public sphere as being already conflicted and imbued with power relations, the idea of agreement around a defined set of (liberal) values is exclusionary and, at worst, dangerous. It is exclusionary because it emphasises us/them divisions and it is dangerous because of the ever present possibility of antagonism. While Habermas saw public space as an arena in which to reach solutions, for Mouffe public space 'is not where we try to reach consensus' and

³ The Naked Public Sphere by Neuhaus (1984) argued that the public sphere was stripped of religion. Neither Allen nor Mouffe refer to Neuhaus or religion in their books yet both argue against Habermas' idealisation that the public sphere is bare and in this way, they overlap with Neuhaus.

overcome the us/them distinction but where there is opportunity for the expression of different ideas, of conflict and dissent (Mouffe in Alvarez 2010:1). In a consensual public sphere where hierarchies of values are clearly outlined, conflicted values are expected to be reconciled. Reconciliation is based on the idea that antagonisms could, and should, be put at bay (Mouffe 2005). Development of antagonisms is particularly likely ‘when “they” is perceived as putting into question the identity of the “we” and is threatening its existence’ (Mouffe 2005: 15). Mouffe argues for a need to channel antagonisms into productive ‘agonisms’⁴ instead of suppressing difference which can lead to unjust politics:

‘While antagonism is the we/they relation in which two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground, agonism is a we/they relation where conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict nevertheless recognise the legitimacy of their opponents’ (Mouffe 2005: 20).

Mouffe’s theoretical inspiration is drawn from the controversial⁵ thinker Carl Schmitt (C. Schmitt 1932) and his influential critique of liberalism. Following him, Mouffe argues that the rationalist belief in the elimination of conflict through universal consensus around a common set of values is based on the exclusion of those who do not subscribe to these values (Mouffe 2005).

The idea that the irrational values of the Others will disappear with progress, does not recognise the conflicts that are bound to emerge whenever there are different groups with competing claims. Such conflicts need not have one rational solution. For Mouffe, ‘the aim cannot be the universalisation of the Western liberal democratic model’. When such a model is imposed and proclaimed to be the legitimate model, it ‘leads to presenting those who do not accept it as “enemies” of civilisation’ (2005: 129).

Importantly, a recognition of conflict does not equate to an encouragement of antagonisms. On the contrary, Mouffe speaks of the necessity of a ‘common bond’

⁴ Chantal Mouffe is not the only theorist discussing agonism. Yet other thinkers such as Honig (1993) and Tully (2003) approach conflict differently and envisage the political as a space of freedom, while Mouffe understands it as a space for conflict (Mouffe 2005: 20).

⁵ The controversiality of Carl Schmitt’s work lies in his compromise with Nazism and can be, understandably read as morally wrong. Mouffe, together with a broad range of scholars influenced by Schmitt such as Habermas himself, Arendt and Benjamin, regard his work on liberalism as an important contribution to current political theory.

that needs to be present within a conflict to avoid the conflicting parties treating each other as enemies and each other's claims as illegitimate and to be eradicated (Mouffe 2005: 20). The need for a 'common bond' will become particularly pronounced in the forthcoming chapters that evidence antagonisms between secularist groups and Muslim groups (mosque case study) and between pro-choice and pro-life groups (abortion case study).

To summarise, taming antagonisms and coming up with channels through which antagonisms can be transformed into agonisms, is an ambitious challenge that Mouffe (2005, 2013) sets for democracies. This is where the thinking of political theorist Danielle Allen (2006) comes into focus in my reading of the Polish case studies. I link Mouffe's proposal of agonism and common bond to Allen's concept of political friendships to provide alternative ways for the conceptualisation of the tensions.

DANIELLE ALLEN AND POLITICAL FRIENDSHIP

To Danielle Allen (2006) political friendships are crucial in managing conflicts between strangers in the public sphere. Allen's writing is also situated as a critique of approaches to conflict that emphasise universal agreement. She, too, emphasises the importance of recognising disagreement. Similarly to Mouffe, Allen is sceptical of the idealisation of agreement in the public sphere, an idea inspired by Kantian reason and later developed by Habermas.

In the introductory chapter of this thesis I quote Allen questioning why 'we idealise the public sphere as a place of full agreement' instead of focusing on disagreements? (Allen 2006:63). This derives from her critique of liberalism's preference towards unanimity. According to her, attempts to reach a 'perfect agreement' are pointless as they prioritise something that is already ideal (D. S. Allen 2006). To Allen it is preferable to acknowledge difference and accommodate imperfections than to call for uniformity. In this respect, Danielle Allen (2006) and Chantal Mouffe (2005) agree in their scepticism of Habermasian agreement.

Allen's theoretical contribution revolves mainly around trust in the project of building political friendships. Political friendship does not mean that conflicted groups and individuals need to overcome their differences, rather a defining criteria of political friendship is that it must be mutual and acknowledge difference and

disagreement without elevating one set of values above the other. She describes political friendship as ‘beginning from this recognition about what we share with people who live around us and in the same polity’ (Allen 2006: xxii). Emphasising political friendship as happening through interactions and not assimilation she emphasises the need for ‘talking to strangers’ (Allen 2006: 161).

For Danielle Allen the priority is ‘wholeness’ rather than ‘oneness’ as an objective for a public sphere that would favour integration of difference over assimilation (Allen 2006: 20). Drawing on Aristotle (1926), she argues for the need to focus on generating trust between strangers. This happens through conversations among strangers with the goal of realising common benefits, yet recognising that no agreement will benefit everyone equally (Aristotle 1926 in Allen 2006). For this to work sacrifice is key. Aristotle (1926) argued, that it is through the recognition of mutual vulnerability, mutual responsibility and importantly, mutual sacrifice that trust is born. The willingness to make sacrifices is particularly important where trust is weak or absent. Such ‘networks of mutual responsibility’, argues Allen (D. S. Allen 2006: 167) have the potential to create political friendships.

In summary, the goal for Allen (2006) is to maximise agreement without dismissing disagreement, disappointment and resentment. According to her ‘a full democratic politics should seek not only agreement but also the democratic treatment of continued disagreement’ (2006:63). Political friendship, when mutual, will inevitably mean that groups in conflict need to accept decisions that they may disagree with. In this, Allen’s insights link well with Mouffe’s idea of agonism.

GEOGRAPHIES OF RELIGION, SECULARISM AND POST-SECULARISM

The second strand of literature that informs this thesis results from my engagement with scholarship within the field of geographies of religion (Cloke and Beaumont 2013; Wilford 2010; Tse 2013b; Cloke 2012; Wilford 2013; Kong 2010). I also draw upon the interdisciplinary literature that has shaped the broader debate within the field of religion and secularism in the public sphere (C Taylor 2007; Charles Taylor 2011a; Butler et al. 2011; Asad 2011:Asad 1993:Asad 2003; Saba Mahmood 2006; Asad et al. 2009; Butler 2008; Habermas 2011) In this section, I look towards a conception of a secular public sphere that demands a vacating of religion (Tse 2013b) and theories suggesting that this hegemonic perception requires rethinking.

Habermas features again in the discussion on the 'post-secular'. His theories in this area have been adopted in geography by Paul Cloke and Justin Beaumont (2013).

GEOGRAPHIES OF RELIGION

In her recent review of the field Lily Kong (2010) states that geography has been slow in taking upon discussion and research concerned with geographies of religion. This is echoed by Justin Wilford (2010) when he writes of geography's careful approach to religion, often focusing on individual experiences or treating religious and ethnic communities interchangeably. Paul Cloke (2012) has argued that despite embracing all sorts of othernesses and difference, in geography religion has been the disciplines' stubborn exception, embodying the unacceptable Other that the discipline does not quite reach out to. Since then, however, articles (Wilford 2010; Tse 2013b; Vanderbeck et al. 2011; Sadgrove et al. 2010; Gökarıksel and Secor 2010; Cloke 2011; Cloke 2012; Cloke and Beaumont 2013) and edited books (Kong, Olson, and Hopkins 2013; R. Phillips 2009; Beaumont and Baker 2011) have reflected growing geographical interest in religion. It seems that a geographical interest in religion has finally blossomed in recent years. Despite that, the discipline has yet to substantially engage with secularism (Wilford 2010) and as I argue in this section, with post-secularism beyond Habermas (2006). Engagement with post-secular theory necessitates a brief reminder of the classical secularisation theory.

SECULARISATION THEORY

Secularisation theory was originally conceived as a way of dealing with increasing religious diversity in the 16th century but emerged in the 1960s in its modern understanding as the secularisation paradigm (Wilford 2010). The argument underpinning the secularisation paradigm, is that the modernisation of society necessarily leads to the decline and privatisation of organised religion (Bruce 1998; Dobbelaere 1987). The continuous presence of religion in the public sphere observed since the 1970s has cast doubt upon the classic secularisation thesis leading some to argue that it is empirically invalid (Casanova 1994).

During a discussion at the 2013 AAG conference, Wilford (2013) attempted to salvage some of the classical work on secularisation by pointing to relevant insights that risk being lost with the overwhelming focus on secularism's shortcomings. Wilford (2010, 2013) troubled what he saw a banishment of secularism across

disciplines as a (Western) European ideology that legitimises its hegemony (Asad 2003, Mahmood 2006, Taylor 2007, 2011). Wilford's (2013) critique of the dismissal of secularism is convincing, particularly in his encouragement to look towards classical secularisation theory as introduced by thinkers such as Durkheim (1912) and in so doing to avoid reducing secularisation theory to only its current expressions. While being mindful of the value of classical secularisation theory understood through differentiation (Wilford 2010), in this thesis I approach the theory through a focus on its recent 'fundamentalist' expressions (Cloeke & Beaumont 2013: 34). Contrary to Wilford's critique of work that is overtly dismissive of secularisation theory, I look toward theoretical insights from Asad (2003), Mahmood (2006), Taylor (2006, 2011), Butler (2008), Brown (2006) and West (2011) that regard secularisation theory with deserved caution, as a necessary challenge to the prevailing conceptions of religion's place in the public sphere. Upon finding such hegemonic expressions in the group tensions in my study, I found solace in the aforementioned work challenging fundamentalist secular trends.

POST-SECULAR THEORY

Post-secularism, as inspired by Jürgen Habermas (2006), has grown out of the failings of secularisation to explain the continuing role of religion in modern societies. Post-secularism is Habermas' modification of his earlier, more exclusive, theory on religion's role in the public sphere. Acknowledging that he had not paid enough attention to religion in his earlier work, Habermas with post-secularism stressed the importance of religious values in cultivating a pluralistic public sphere (Mendieta & Vanantwerpen 2011).

For Habermas the pre-condition of post-secularity is mutual translation. This means that a translation into a secular and universal language is exacted upon both religious and secular groups (Habermas 2011). Taylor (2011) problematises mutual translation as a view of religion that places the religious outside of what is considered 'the society' and as he asserts, it treats religion as a 'special case'. Taylor describes the idea of asking people to deliberate in the language of reason alone and leave their religious views in the vestibule of the public sphere as a tyrannical demand. As such, I argue that seen in this way religion gets only a supporting role in a post-secular society. To summarise, I critique the heavy reliance of Habermas'

theory of mutual translation as reminiscent of earlier Habermasian bracketing of otherness.

POST-SECULARISM IN GEOGRAPHY

In geography, post-secular interventions aim to nuance secularisation theory (Beaumont 2008, Kong 2010). Initially adopted by a small group of geographers (Clope & Beaumont 2013, Baker 2008, Beaumont 2008) the interest in post-secular theory has recently grown within the discipline as evidenced by the multitude of sessions devoted to it at the 2013 American Association of Geographers Annual Meeting⁶. To Beaumont (2008) post-secular theory recognises the enduring presence of religion in the public sphere and addresses the limitations of the secularisation thesis. Cloke and Beaumont (2013) argue that post-secular theory does not suggest the demise of secularisation theory, but rather that post-secular theory should be looked to in order ‘to trace new interconnections between diverse religious, humanist and secularist positionalities in the dynamic geographies of the city’ (Clope and Beaumont 2013: 29) and to challenge the more fundamentalist expressions of secularism. In the work of Cloke and Beaumont (2013), post-secular theory is seen as opening up new opportunities for collaboration ‘across inter-religious and religious-secular boundaries in the public sphere’ that might have been masked under linear understandings of secularisation. The authors argue that limited understandings of secularism can take a fundamentalist turn when they become insistent on sharp dichotomous divides between the religious and the secular (Clope and Beaumont 2013).

CRITIQUE OF POST-SECULAR THEORY

Post-secular theory has been contested, with some critiquing post-secularism as embodying a desire to colonise the public sphere with religion (Clope 2012). I argue however, that a more accurate critique of post-secularism must recognise its shortcomings in paying too little rather than too much attention to religion. While the idea behind the post-secular aims partly to function as a critique of the established secularisation theory outlined above, I will argue that its non-radical approach fails to challenge the superiority of the secular public sphere. The theory

⁶ Post-secular spaces: explorations beyond secular theory and research I, II and III, Rising to the challenge: defining the contours of a new 21st century critical urban theory (CUT): Session 2; Thinking the unthinkable in CUT - globalized religion and the visceral politics of recognition

goes as far as inviting religion back to the public realm, yet only when religion agrees to communicate in the secular lexicon.

Importantly, Cloke (2012) encourages looking towards ways that religions can facilitate dialogues on justice. Cloke's (2012) approach although hopeful and justice-oriented is unable to stand up to his own critique of secularism and takes a disappointing turn in arguing that human geographers might want to accept the more *progressive* parts of religion (Cloke 2012; *my emphasis*). Here Cloke reveals the limits of Habermas' post-secular approach. Preferring only the 'progressive' manifestations of religion in the public sphere, Cloke and Beaumont's (2013) recent post-secular interventions closely follow Habermasian post-secularism in a way that is unnecessarily restrictive. While the insistence on recognising 'the hushed up voice of religion' to be 'released back into the public sphere' (Cloke & Beaumont 2013:27) is important, it is limiting in the way that only liberal religious subjects are encouraged to join in the public debate, and in the way that to do so they are required to translate from their religious language. Justin Tse (2013) warns of the premature celebration of the post-secular:

'To portray de facto interfaith mixing in religious spaces for secular causes is to bracket the transcendent and elevate an immanent sphere of action' (Tse 2013a: 12)

By insisting on remaining within the boundaries of secularism, Cloke & Beaumont (2013) implicitly devalue the non-secular. Their focus on ways to enhance the secular with the non-secular thereby confirms the dominant and superior position of secularism in the public sphere.

THE SECULAR AND THE POST-SECULAR IN POLAND

The 'historical patterns of convergence and divergence in Polish and Western European religious developments' is complex (José Casanova 2004: 2). The post-Communist countries' historical separateness from countries on the other side of the Iron Curtain resulted in different secularisation processes, even if those of course differed between national contexts (José Casanova 2003).

Lily Kong (2010) suggests that the experiences of secularisation in Europe have been over-generalised to apply to other parts of the world and further suggests that 'even the experiences within Europe are not as monolithic as earlier suggested' and

that ‘some of the evidences of secularisation need to be interrogated’ (Kong 2010: 10). What Kong suggests is that secularism needs to be properly understood and ‘interrogated before accepting the emergence of post-secularisation’ (Kong 2010: 764). This is true in the Polish case. Its historical context being quite distinct from that of Western Europe, it has experienced very different processes of secularisation. Where Kong is mistaken, however, is in her linear conception of the secular, where the post-secular precedes the secular. Consequently, this does not fit with developments in Poland.

Based on Charles Taylor’s (2007) definition of the three modes of secularisation⁷, Polish scholars have highlighted contradictory secularisation processes occurring after the fall of Communism (Kościelniak 2011; Bartos 2011; Kasperek 2010). The fall of the Communist system brought about a desecularisation of the public sphere (reversed secularisation 1) however, simultaneously the religious practice of Poles started to decline (secularisation 2) and a differentiation of religious and non-religious views emerged (secularisation 3) (Kościelniak 2011).

Additionally, Kong’s caution with regards to the danger of the generalisation of trends in Western European countries is important. Yet within an understanding where there is no linear and defined process where the secular proceeds the post-secular, there is still value in looking towards the post-secular as a needed (and potentially radical) critique of secularism’s fundamentalist expressions even in contexts where secularism is argued not to have ‘arrived’. This is clearly evident in Poland, where despite society having gone through in many ways a contradictory process of secularisation (José Casanova 2004), the groups in focus in my study apply Habermasian understandings of the place of religion in the public sphere. In this sense, a post-secular perspective that is critically engaged with the secular is missing. Jose Casanova (2011) recently summarised some of these debates by arguing that even if society is not entering a post-secular age just yet, there is a need to develop a post-secularist reflexivity.

To summarise, I understand the emergence of post-secular theory as a hopeful, if limited, step towards an agonistic public sphere. I particularly attempt to draw

⁷ Secularism 1: Decreasing religious presence in the public sphere, Secularism 2: Diminishing of religious practices and Secularism 3: Growth of pluralism of religious views , beliefs and values where Christianity becomes one of many options

attention to the limitations of both secular and post-secular theories for their hampering of possibilities to challenge the hegemony of secularism and share the public sphere with non-secular discourses.

POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND/IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Can a story about Slavdom and about Poland be told from a postcolonial critique?

(Janion 2006:10)

The third strand of literature that informs this thesis draws on postcolonial theory. The way it is applied in this study follows in the footsteps of scholars who argue for the relevance of locating postcolonial studies in post-socialist contexts in Central and Eastern Europe (Owczarzak 2010; Korek 2009; Todorova 2009; Lindelof 2001; Kuus 2004; Domanski 2004; Stenning 2005; Rigo 2005; Light and Young 2009; Janion 2006; Cavanagh 2004; Leiber 2007; Kulpa and Mizielinska 2011).

By looking back at Poland's historically troubled peripheral position towards Western Europe, the application of postcolonial theory becomes useful, particularly in the study of sexual and religious politics where the discourses readily draw from Western narratives. Here, postcolonial insights facilitate the carving out of a critical way to engage with some of the central discourses in the forthcoming empirical chapters and, possibly, provide a foundation upon which counter-hegemonic and hopeful spaces can be built.

APPLYING POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

Postcolonial theory as a theoretical strand challenges Western superiority through historical dominance of its Eastern Others (Said 1979). Concerned with the Orient, Said (1979) conceptualised it as a non-nuanced geographical, cultural, historical and political entity that needs to be governed by the 'real Europeans' that continuously will reaffirm the Other's subordinate position. In this thesis, Western Europe's Others are, the Slavs, the Central and Eastern Europeans and more precisely, the Poles.

The Othering, as Said (1979) argued is built on binary oppositions that serve to underpin the asymmetrical us and them division. As Chakrabarty (2000) argues, a Eurocentric worldview has become the measure against which 'political

(democratic), economic (capitalist) and social (secular) transitions' are judged (Mayblin 2014: 95). Although Chakrabarty (2000) focuses on the 'third world', I argue alongside scholars on Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) that these insights also apply to the 'second world' which comprises of countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Postcolonial theory has been accused of 'homogenising and essentialising the West' and consequently for reinforcing 'the binary between the Orient and the "Occident"' (Nayak and Jeffrey 2013: 265–266). According to Nayak & Jeffrey postcolonial theory risks ignoring non-Western scholarship that 'writes back' to challenge Orientalist narratives. The authors argue that in light of non-Western and Occidentalist scholarship, the position of the West as 'the glowing beacon of modernity that other nation states strive to follow' is shaken (Nayak and Jeffrey 2013: 266). It is certainly valid to repeat, particularly in my work that deals with the non-West, that the category of the West is not homogenous. Yet I am cautious about an over-emphasis on the subaltern 'speaking back' or even the idea of 'mutually constitutive imagined geographies of East and West' (Nayak and Jeffrey 2013: 266). This is rooted in my understanding of Western knowledge production, in this case towards its peripheral other in Central and Eastern Europe, as one where Western and non-Western geographies are not mutually involved in producing knowledge about each other but are constantly subject to ever-present Western hegemony. The understanding that I apply in this section is one that treats the postcolonial as a conceptual rather than only as a chronological category (Hesse and Sayyid 2006). I understand that non-Western knowledges evade the Western gaze precisely due to the continuous West/non-West power relations, and that this raises the question of whether the subaltern can in fact speak (Spivak 1988).

POSTCOLONIAL POLAND

Scholarship that applies a postcolonial lens to the analysis of Central and Eastern Europe is fairly recent. Maria Todorova stands out with early postcolonial insights on Eastern Europe by adapting Saidian Colonialism to the Balkans (Todorova 1997). Todorova uses the term 'Balkanisation' as applied to Othering of Eastern Europe as 'tribal, backward, primitive and barbarian' (Todorova 1997: 3). The application of the postcolonial perspective to Poland aids in the analysis of the dominant discourses expressed in the conflicts that I studied.

POLAND'S ROLE IN COLONIAL EUROPE

I opened this section with a question Maria Janion posed to herself: 'Can a story about Slavdom and about Poland be told from a postcolonial critique?' (Janion 2006: 10). Janion approaches this challenge in her analysis of 18th Century Polish literature through which she maps the Polish postcolonial condition. Janion uses Said's (1979) classical work on Orientalism where he establishes the framework for theorising the 'Orient'. Janion (2006) agrees that the cultural narcissism of the West feeds on its unshakable conviction of its natural superiority over other civilisations and in this analysis she considers Eastern Europe to be part of the imagined Saidian East rather than Europe (Janion 2006).

Historically, knowledge production in the West has applied prejudiced distortions towards Eastern Europe that were reminiscent of colonial discourses (Davies 1996; Janion 2006). Ancient antagonism between civilisation and barbarism translate into an opposition between West and East where the Easternness of a nation becomes the measurement of its lower status - its barbarism (Janion 2006). The 19th century historian Leopold von Ranke described Slavs and people in the East as subjects of trickle-down developments from Western Europe and were themselves merely functioning as 'silent extras' in the ongoing developments in Western Europe 'exerting no influence of their own' (Pach 1991: 191; Janion 2006: 165). Poland's relationship to the West in the 16th and 17th centuries was marked by Western colonisation (Pach 1991). The industrial development of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) was restricted as a consequence of the West's exploitation of its colonies leading the CEE to become an agrarian periphery to the West (Pach 1991).

CREATION OF CENTRAL EUROPE

Poland has for a long time strived for closeness to the imagined community of Europe (Hagen 2003) even if historically it has time and again been separated, cut-off or designated to belong to the Other side of Europe. Poland's rejection of its position in the European East has contributed to the emphasis on the term Central Europe to mark out countries such as Poland, Czech and Hungary (Todorova 1997). Janion (2006) positions herself critically with regard to the concept of 'Central

Europe⁸. For her the terminology in itself is a rejection of the imagined community of Slavdom: ‘This Slavdom is something suppressed, untamed, perhaps inhuman’ (Janion 2006:165). Poland’s Slavdom was left behind for a modified concept of Central Europe that problematically accounted for those countries that were culturally ‘closer’ to the West.

Due to the Cold War, the end of Communism and most recently the EU enlargement, Poles have found themselves sitting on the fence between East and West with Poland’s location in Europe sometimes referred to as at East of the West and West of the East (Janion 2006). Poland has been centrally entangled in what became the end of a certain world order (Bauman 1989) and the beginning of a new set of power relations, placing Poland in a ‘post-socialist condition’ (Stenning 2005:113). A transitional state seems to have ‘marked’ Poland (Todorova 2009: 197) as ‘semi-developed’ (Hagen 2003, Todorova 2009, Light and Young 2009).

Since 1989, discourses about Poland’s ‘reunification’ with Europe (Liebert 2007) or ‘return’ to Europe (Hagen 2003) have been expressed from both inside and outside of Poland. It was then that the country was seen to have started the process of ‘catching up’ with the ‘progressive’ West (Lindelof 2001). As a result, scholarship falls into the trap of reproducing the ‘catching-up’ narrative by trying to find evidence of Poland having finally arrived in modernity⁹.

Recent scholarship (Kulpa and Mizielinska 2011, Mizielinska 2011) has taken issue with these perspectives, emphasising the fallacy of the Western European criteria that result in problematic conclusions about Poland. Furthermore, as Merje Kuus (2004) argues, the 2004 EU enlargement when Poland ‘re-joined Europe’ was framed within a dichotomy between Western Europe and Eastern Europe. ‘We have returned to the European family’ (Kwaśniewski 2003) were the words proclaimed by the then acting President Aleksander Kwaśniewski as Poland joined the

⁸ Her conviction is that there is nothing particularly common that historically binds CEE, only the fragile fabricated bonds between countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary forged around the totalitarian experiences of these countries.

⁹ A couple of notable examples can be found in the thesis of the weakness of civil society in post-Communist countries (Howard 2002) and in the descriptions of the lacking of a feminist movement in Poland (Bystydziński 2001). The premise of such work is an established model based on Western European civil society with its constituent feminist and LGBT movements. Consequently, what does not fit with these defined structures, what is not comprehensible within these established criteria, is disregarded.

European Union in 2004. The moment was captured in the Western media with the image of a ‘babushka’-like figure casting her vote, smiling, in a place that looked distanced from a European imaginary (BBC 2003). Despite becoming part of ‘the European family’ Poland was represented as a second, and more backward, cousin joining the family reunion late, arriving by horse and cart. Janion argues that ‘the cultural contempt of Europe towards the small Eastern nations stirs in us anger, bitterness and sadness’ (2006: 20). She encourages the mobilisation of alternative narratives in accordance with Alison Stenning’s calls for a production of non-Western knowledges through non-Western experiences with the aid of postcolonial theory (2005).

‘I just wish that – for the sake of balance – there would be acknowledgement of the far-reaching effects that the conviction of our marginality in Europe has... a different narrative can tell our cultural history differently’ (Janion 2006:20).

Drawing on a postcolonial perspective in this study aids the understanding of conflicts in the Polish public sphere by considering complex power relations between the categories of the West and Poland, particularly in light of the important restructuring in Europe at the key historical moments of 1989 (end of Communism) and 2004 (EU’s Eastern Enlargement).

CONCLUSION

The confluence of theories on conflict in the public sphere, secularism and post-secularism as well as post-colonialism engaged with in this theoretical chapter establishes a critical theoretical position that will inform the forthcoming empirical chapters. This chapter presented a critique of the strands in geography such as post-secularism that follow too closely a Habermasian notion of mutual translation that fails to challenge an inherent limitation of secular liberalism when dealing with its ‘others’. As I have argued, this effects the way that conflict is dealt with in the public sphere predicated upon agreement over a certain ‘universal’ set of values. Following Mouffe (2006, 2013) and Allen (2006), my key theoretical argument is that *agonism* and *political friendships* rather than ideal agreement and consensus need to be prioritised in understanding and dealing with tension and difference in the Polish public sphere. Furthermore, my hope is to advance academic knowledge on sexual and religious conflicts in the Central and Eastern European public sphere

with a postcolonial theoretical perspective to allow a critical engagement with Poland's relationship with and to the category of the West.

In summary, my theoretical contribution with this thesis considers the notion that a dominant view of a consensual public sphere is problematic in the study of conflict. This is argued through the knitting together of intersecting literatures on conflict and dialogue with recent post-secular advancements in the field of geography and postcolonial insights for a more robust engagement with hegemonic formations expressed in group tensions around sexual and religious politics.

CHAPTER 3.

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the study's methodological approach, focusing on the challenges of working with groups in conflict (Muslim, Catholic, feminist and Islamophobic/racist). The methodological approach consisted of mixed qualitative methods involving 72 participants across both case studies.

I write this thesis from a feminist and anti-racist ideological position. Following Kobayashi (1994) I recognise that my research is political and that the focus of this research reflect my own ideologies and personal/political struggles and privileges. This chapter discusses the ways that my positionality influenced, aided, hindered and complicated the research process. Instances where my assumptions about access and commonality were not met emphasise a fluidity that troubles the insider/outsider dichotomy. Reflecting on the challenges of having to do research with groups that were in complex conflicts with one another, and at times with me as the researcher, establishes the original contribution of this chapter.

METHODS

The main methods applied in this study were: focus groups, interviews and participant observation. Secondary data such as official documentation, campaign materials and media articles were also gathered to better illustrate the findings. Mixed qualitative methods were judged to be the most suitable approach for gaining a holistic understanding of the two complex case studies (Silva, Warde, and Wright 2009).

CASE STUDY APPROACH

Researchers use the case study approach to focus detailed attention on certain phenomena facilitating an in-depth understanding of an event, group or activity (Clifford, French, and Valentine 2010; Cresswell 2002). Due to the specificity of this method (i.e. focusing intently on one or a few chosen cases) it is difficult to make generalisations about the studied phenomenon as a case study does not provide a representative sample (Rice 2010). It is therefore argued that geographers

should be wary of the risks of subjectivity that a case study approach brings with it (Rice 2010).

Bearing in mind that this study is rooted in feminist methodologies that reject a positivist assumption of neutrality and understand every method to be imbued in a certain subjectivity, it is nevertheless recognised here that the chosen cases cannot underpin claims about other group conflicts in the Polish public sphere. Rather, the intention in this study is to focus careful attention on two different phenomena – mosque and abortion politics - which serve as detailed examples of two key tensions in Poland. Focusing on two cases allows an in-depth and detailed understanding of the issues (Cresswell 2002).

Yet this study goes beyond a sole focus on the two case studies. Similarly to geographers using the case study approach, most notably Tim Cresswell’s seminal study of three separate phenomena across different geographical locations (see Cresswell 1996), my intent is to focus beyond the cases themselves to uncover wider patterns. As Harvey (1969, quoted in; Clifford, French, and Valentine 2010) has argued, a detailed study of a case unveils wider structures. Drawing from that, through focusing attention on telling a story of mosque and abortion politics in Warsaw, this study sheds light on ‘processes that operate at broader scales’ (Jones III and Gomez 2010: 67), enabling insights into sexual and religious politics in the Polish public sphere without making generalisable claims about all such conflicts.

Timeline for pre-fieldwork October 2011 – July 2012

Oct – Dec 2010	Identifying case studies
Dec 2010	Contact made with key groups
Jan 2011	Orientation fieldwork in Warsaw to identify relevant case studies
May 2011	Recruitment letters (x10) sent to groups in Warsaw
Jun 2011	Pilot Study, Warsaw
Jul – Aug 2011	Ethical review process, preparation for fieldwork
Sep 2011 - Jul 2012	Fieldwork in Warsaw

RECRUITMENT

I initiated the recruitment process prior to moving to Warsaw. In the first instance I emailed ten people identified as gatekeepers to the various groups (pro-life, pro-choice, Catholic, Muslim and anti-mosque/anti-Muslim groups) and managed to establish contact with all of the groups apart from the pro-life and Catholic groups. When designing my initial leaflets to recruit pro-life and pro-choice groups, I used the term ‘reproductive rights’. I later realised this was a term mainly used by feminists and pro-choice advocates and less used or even rejected by the Polish pro-life community. Learning from this I produced a second leaflet focused on the ‘abortion law’ as this was how the conflict was typically referred to in Poland. Once in Warsaw I produced leaflets¹⁰ inviting participants to participate in the mosque case study. I distributed the leaflets mainly in the Ochota neighbourhood – the neighbourhood where the new mosques was being built. Aiming to get local resident’s perspectives, I left leaflets in people’s post boxes, in local cultural centres and on public notice boards. Additionally I contacted the local newspaper in Ochota and placed an advertisement requesting interested participants to contact me. Despite these efforts, in the end it was through the method of snowballing that I recruited most participants.

A substantial part of my fieldwork involved identifying key events that related to the case studies. I attended events such as debates, demonstrations and talks to recruit people face to face for both case studies. The recruitment process, especially for focus groups, proved to be challenging, with some rejections, many silences following my inquiries and cases of participants not returning calls or failing to show up to scheduled meetings. Following these experiences, I introduced a financial incentive for focus group participation. In contrast to interviews, focus groups were more difficult to schedule and required participants from different parts of the city to travel to a chosen location. I offered a payment of 50 Polish zloty¹¹, equivalent to approximately £10 for participation in a one to two hour focus group session.

¹⁰ I printed approximately 200 copies of A5 leaflets.

¹¹ Monthly social welfare in Poland can often be as little as £100 a month.

TIME FRAME AND DATA SUMMARY

In total for both case studies, I conducted 19 individual interviews (of which five were informal – not recorded), 4 paired interviews (that were meant to be focus groups but not enough people attended) and 10 focus groups. I also conducted 25 participant observations. This is expanded in the two tables below:

INTERVIEWS, FOCUS GROUPS & PARTICIPANT OBSERVATIONS ¹²		
DATA	MOSQUE CASE STUDY	ABORTION CASE STUDY
Individual Interviews (II)	Interviews with mosque supporters: (x5) Interviews with mosque opponents: (x4) TOTAL II = 9 (7 formal, 2 informal)	Interviews with pro-choice: (x6) Interviews with pro-life: (x4) TOTAL II: 10 (9 formal, 1 informal)
Paired Interviews (PI)	Mosque opponents: (x2) TOTAL PI = 2	Pro-choice: (x2) TOTAL PI = 2
Focus Groups (FG)	FG with mosque supporters/Muslims: (x3) FG with mosque opponents: (x3) TOTAL FG = 6	Focus groups with pro-choice: (x1) Focus groups with pro-life: (x3) TOTAL FG = 4
Participant observation (PO)	Spaces: Mosque (x5) Mosque construction sites (x3) Events: Day of Islam in Catholic Church (x1) Brotherhood in Islam Muslim lecture (x1) Diversity within Islam, Warsaw University Muslim women meetings (x3), Dec 2011-March 2012 Highschool event on challenging Islamophobia, January 2012 (x1) Total number of observations = 14 Total number of hours = around 35-40h	Spaces: Church (x3) Events Pro-choice 'Yes to Women' citizen initiative rally, Political Critique, 09/2011 (x1) Pro-choice book debate 'Big book on Abortion', 10/2011 (x1) Pro-choice citizen debate, 11/2011 (x1) Pro-choice press conference, 11/2011 (x1) Pro-life demonstration/vigil, 09/2011-02/2012 (x3) Patriotic debate, Nov 2011 (x1) Independent Day March, Nov 2011 Total number of observations = 11 Total number of hours = around 20-25h
	Participants N=39	Participants N=33
	TOTAL NR OF FG & INTERVIEWS: 33 TOTAL NR OF PO AND HOURS ACROSS STUDY: 25 OBSERVATION AND 55-65h TOTAL NR OF PARTICIPANTS ACROSS STUDY: N=72	

¹² The total number and hours spent on observations is an estimate due to my frequent appearance at different events where it is difficult to mark when the observation starts and finishes.

Mosque case study (n=39)		
Muslim women's group	Focus group	Aisha, Dagmara, Oliwia, Gabriela, Lena, Nadia
Muslim men	Individual interviews	Imam, Marian, Marek, Hubert, Bartłomiej
Secularist group	Individual interviews	Andrzej, Norbert
Ochota neighbourhood locals	Focus group	Sasha, Krysia, Marcela, Kacper, Celina
Ochota neighbourhood locals	Focus group	Olek, Pola, Patrycja, Bartosz, Wiktor
Ochota neighbourhood locals	Paired interview	Adriana and Franciszek
Ochota neighbourhood Councillor	Individual interview	Ochota councillor
Włochy neighbourhood locals	Paired interview	Krystyna and Sylwia
Włochy neighbourhood councillor	Individual interview	Włochy councillor
Choir group	Focus group	Teresa, Helena, Michalina
Choir group	Focus group	Daniel, Bożena, Gosia
High school group	Focus group	Marta, Jan, Antoni, Natalia
Abortion case study (n=33)		
Pro-choice activists	Individual interviews	Amelia, Elena, Maja, Magda, Edyta, Basia
Yes to Women pro-choice	Paired interview	Gizela and Iga
Pro-choice feminists	Paired interview	Jagoda and Aneta
Pro-choice sexual educators	Focus group	Karolina, Marcelina, Klara, Lucja
Palikot Movement	Individual interview	Palikot Movement
Pro-life activists	Individual interviews	Ava, Zygmunt, Aldona, Waldemar
Pro-life Catholic group	Focus group	Paweł, Oskar, Wiktoria, Kaja, Arek
Catholic community group	Focus group	Fabian, Liliana, Ignacy, Stefan
Hospital protestors	Focus group	Julia, Miłosz, Zuzanna, Marcelina, Szymon

ETHICS, RECORDING, CODING AND ANALYSING

All participants signed a consent form where they agreed to be interviewed and were made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any point. This was an important formality that gave the participants a sense of control and reassurance of privacy (Valentine 2002). The research questions were approved by the Ethics Committee at Leeds University¹³. Prior to each interview I explained to the participants that the study was concerned with groups that had conflicting values and that interviews would be undertaken with ‘both sides’ of the tension. All participants in the study were anonymised however some of the participants who were members of small groups or held positions that were identifiable in a small community, such as local councillors, were made aware that despite being anonymised there was a chance that they would be identifiable. None of the participants had an issue with this, however, in these cases I have made efforts to protect their identity by altering or withholding certain identifiable details. One focus group was conducted with a group of students that engaged in challenging Islamophobia in their local school by organising events and talks. Three of the four participants were 17 years old and thus needed parental approval for participation. I designed separate consent forms for their parents as well as had a meeting where the principal of the school granted her approval.

All interview materials were kept secure on password protected devices. The interviews and focus groups were recorded on a dictaphone, with a few exceptions where an informal meeting turned into an interview, or when the circumstances of the meeting did not make it appropriate to record such as before mosque prayers for example. In these cases, extensive notes were taken during the conversation as well as afterwards. Despite interviews being scheduled to take approximately 60 minutes and focus groups scheduled to take 90 minutes, the length of the interviews and focus groups varied significantly. The shortest focus group lasted only 13 minutes and was conducted with six people in -18 degrees outside a hospital before a pro-life demonstration. In contrast, the longest running interview lasted 228 minutes. All of the participant observations were recorded, using mediums of recording appropriate to the situations being observed. Formal audio recording was used during official

¹³ My PhD was for the first two years based at Leeds University after which it moved as a consequence of the move of the LiveDifference project to Sheffield University.

press conferences, meetings or debates and note taking was the preferred method during demonstrations and talks, while in more sensitive settings such as informal gatherings or prayers, notes were recorded upon my return from the observations; on the bus or once back at home. The process of coding and analysing the data took place in various stages. After each interview, a document of ‘post-interview notes’ was created where key reflections that the dictaphone was unlikely to pick up were noted (atmosphere during interview, my emotions during the interview, the body language etcetera).

All interviews were conducted in Polish and were transcribed and some were translated. The process of translation or as Twyman et al 1999: 320) describes it as a ‘mapping of one language onto another’ was a demanding task. Field notes, notes from participant observations, field diaries, comments and reflections scribbled down in notebooks and on post-its were written in both Polish and English and sometimes, unintentionally, in Swedish (Sweden being the place where I have lived for most of my life). I started transcribing the interviews while simultaneously translating them from Polish to English. This tested my ability to move between Polish and English¹⁴. I soon realised that this was not only a time consuming endeavour but also one where meaning risked being ‘lost in translation’, even when notes were taken in cases of ambiguity during the translation process. The role of the translator brought with it additional responsibilities and power in the way in which I represented the narratives of my participants (Temple and Koterba 2009). Following these realisations I transcribed the interviews in their original language (Polish) allowing for the transcripts to capture the original meaning of the participant’s narratives. Each transcribed interview was printed and read at least once with manual codes applied in the margins of the transcripts. The transcripts were then imported into the qualitative data analysis software NVivo and coded a second time, printed and re-read, additional codes, notes and comments were added at this stage. Throughout the coding process, new categories were created and the codes quickly expanded in volume. The coding categories were generated using a bottom-up approach when reading the transcripts rather than being defined prior to

¹⁴ I am a native Polish speaker yet have lived in Sweden most of my life which to some extent impacts my Polish fluency.

the coding process. This at times created overlapping codes but had the advantage of allowing the findings to emerge organically from the data.

FOCUS GROUPS

My primary methods, as anticipated, were focus groups. The way that the focus groups were conducted did not reflect the 'manual' of ideal focus groups. The ideal stated way of conducting focus groups is to choose a homogenous group of people that do not know each other (Tonkiss 2004). Due to snowballing being my most successful recruitment strategy, my focus groups mainly consisted of people who did know one another. Furthermore, it is stated in the literature on focus groups that the optimal number of participants in a focus group is four to eight (Bloor et al. 2001; Hofmeyer and Scott 2007). While my own ambitions initially aimed to follow these established guidelines, I had to adapt my strategy to suit the focus group constellations that I was able to recruit. Half of my overall number of focus groups (7 out of 14) had less than five participants and two of the focus groups had only two participants, subsequently becoming 'paired interviews'. Initially I treated these as 'failed focus groups' yet similarly to Longhurst (1996:144), I later realised their richness. Smaller focus groups provided an intimate atmosphere where a certain depth of discussion could be reached that otherwise would perhaps not surface especially when discussing tensions surrounding sensitive topics such as values, beliefs and conflicts (Longhurst 1996). Nevertheless, they differed from individual interviews as some form of 'group dynamic' was maintained even with two or three participants. Furthermore, smaller groups allowed for a clear recording that, in contrast to the groups that involved more than four people, were, as Hopkins (2007) described, less noisy and chaotic and consequently easier to transcribe. My experiences support the idea that when the discussion involves sensitive or controversial issues, smaller focus groups might be more appropriate (Hopkins 2007). Peter Hopkins focuses on the out-of-the-ordinary ways that focus group can be conducted (Hopkins 2007). According to him, focus group participants who do know one another are more comfortable voicing their disagreements on particular points with the other participants than they would be if they were acquainted.

Literature has encouraged thinking of focus groups as a way to enhance feminist methodologies (Hyams 2004; Kitziinger 1994; Nairn 2002; Pratt 2002; Wilkinson 1999). Despite there always being hierarchies of power in such interactions, Pratt

argues that focus groups ‘offer the potential for less hierarchical relations between researcher and researched’ (Pratt 2002:222). Hyams argues that focus groups are ‘potentially empowering as they explore and enable group members’ social agency and collective knowledge production (Hyams 2004:106). Additionally, in conducting focus groups the researcher has a less central role allowing the group to shape its own agenda instead of being guided (Hyams 2004; Pratt 2002). My role as a researcher was indeed less central when conducting focus groups than when undertaking interviews and at times I felt as if the group were so engaged in debating with each other, that they forgot about my presence as a researcher. This gave me the opportunity to observe intra-group interactions, relations and tensions.

INTERVIEWS

Interviews were initially arranged with people that were identified as gatekeepers or had a more prominent role in the group. During individual interviews, my interaction with the interviewee was more fragile than my interaction with participants in the focus groups. Here, my relationship with the participant had a greater impact on the overall level of trust and the richness of the information provided (Enosh and Buchbinder 2005). My personality also played a bigger part in individual interviews (Moser 2008). On the occasions where I felt the respondent warmed to me, they proved to be willing to go out of their way to provide me with information, contacts, give me lifts and keep in touch or even develop a friendship after the fieldwork was completed. When this was not the case, my material was thinner and I usually did not manage to gain further access to the groups that the particular interviewee was part of.

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

I conducted participant observation in spaces identified by me as significant for the different groups. I undertook observations at debates, demonstrations, talks, petition collections, prayers and press conferences. I also took field notes of my observations and, additionally, I wrote notes to reflect the emotional processes attached to conducting participant observations in unfamiliar settings and situations. As reflected below, the challenges of working with different and conflicted groups were noted at the very beginning of the fieldwork:

After a few weeks in the field I have prayed in the mosque, attended an Islamophobic debate, held witness in front of a poster of an aborted foetus, gone to a feminist pro-choice demo and tried to get out of an invitation to an exorcism session. The insider and outsider positionality feels far from stable.

(Field notes, November 2011)

Apart from making connections and getting closer to the groups, the observations I conducted also gave me an insight into the interactions between the groups and the wider public, as well as the interactions of members of the same group. One such example was the bus ride to the mosque where I undertook participant observations. Such participant observations that I just happened to ‘step into’ provided me with rich data. The bus has been described as a space of ‘extraordinary intimacy with others and intense materiality, where bodies are pressed up against each other, seats are shared, and personal boundaries are constantly negotiated’ (Wilson 2011: 635). While the bus journey might be a space for encounters with the unacquainted others (Jensen 2009), in ethnically and religiously homogenous Poland, bus encounters would not commonly involve interactions with passengers that were visibly ‘other’. Bus 90 on route from Warsaw city centre to the suburb of the Warsaw mosque was an exception. Sitting on the bus from my Warsaw home to the mosque for events or meetings with the participants, I was able to make rich observations and take detailed notes both during the bus journey but also at bus stops. This is reflected in an observation from a bus stop I scribbled down on pieces of paper on one such bus ride:

Every Friday after prayers the empty bus stop outside the mosque quickly filled with people dispersing from the mosque after the prayer. Apart from myself and one Polish convert wearing a hijab, there were only men at the bus stop. A couple of them had big bags of rice resting by their legs that they had purchased in the shop located under the mosque. They could have been international students, I remember seeing them get on the bus on the way to prayers at one of the university stops. An older Tunisian man that I had encountered previously at the bus stop greeted me with Salam Alaikum when I approached. None of the other people in the space interacted, huddling inside a bus stand seeking protection from the freezing temperature. And yet, there was an atmosphere of awareness of everyone just coming back from the same

space where they prayed together. This was noticeable in the curious but shy looks of people that were eager to get back to whatever they had dropped to come to Friday prayers. A car, coming out from the mosque parking space, stopped at the bus stop. The Tunisian man jumped in. Shortly after, a delayed bus approached and filled up with the people from the mosque. Suddenly we all faded from the group identity we formed at the bus stop and dispersed to different parts of the bus. I blended in more than my fellow bus stop companions who visibly stood out from the white Poles. Some of them attracted curious looks from the other passengers, something they themselves either did not notice too much or were perhaps used to.

(Participant observation, bus stop outside mosque, January 2012)

Participant observations such as these allowed me to get a sense of the wider Muslim community beyond those that became my participants but also allowed me to get closer to the participants that I wished to conduct interviews and focus groups with. Spending time with the Muslim women's group for example prior to conducting interviews with them, allowed me to get an understanding of some of the issues key to them which I later was able to explore during the focus group. To take best advantage of this I conducted most focus groups four to six months into my fieldwork and conducted interviews and participant observations in the first few months of my stay in Warsaw. Another such example was my reoccurring presence at pro-life events before recruitment for focus groups and interviews. My presence at different events certainly did create a familiarity with my person among the group members, even if despite spending nine months in the field, I was never 'part of the group'. Here, I echo the difficulties that researchers who conduct participant observations face and argue for a need to approach with caution assumptions of becoming 'part of' or embedded in a group through participant observation. This was perhaps most famously noted in the case of Sudhir Venkatesh's (2009) study of Chicago gangs. Praised for its 'ethnographic imagination' (Bjork, 2009:289) Venkatesh's study has also been criticised for not rising above the researchers own naivety (Grimes 2008). The study makes clear that a separation between overt and covert participant observation is often vague and that there is no clear line between insider and outsider research. During my fieldwork, the borders between being a 'fly on the wall' taking notes while being fully detached from the social situation on the one hand and, on the other hand, being fully immersed in the context by joining a

group and observing it from the inside, were blurred. This sometimes led to tensions encouraging a critical scrutiny of my own positionality as a researcher working across conflicting groups.

POSITIONALITY

This project is inspired by feminist methodological approaches within geography and beyond, critically reflecting on my own subjectivities and personal investment into this research project as well as interrogating the limitations of these methods (Abu-Lughod 2008; Nairn 2002; Davidman 2000; McDowell 1992; Finch 2004; Scharff 2010; Roseneil 1993; Marshall, Roseneil, and Armstrong 2009; Valentine 2002). As such, a significant part of the methodological focus is on emphasising the non-neutrality of my role as a researcher (Valentine 2002), recognising the persistent power relations between the researcher and the participants (McDowell 1992) and acknowledging that all knowledge is situated and that my position as a researcher influences the way the research is conducted and the outcomes of it (Harding 1991; Haraway 1991).

WHO IS ENTITLED TO RESEARCH WHAT TOPICS?

‘Who is entitled to research what topics?’ (Valentine 2002: 117) was a question that echoed throughout my research. It is intimately related to Kobayashi’s (1994: 76) question of ‘Who speaks with whom?’ My upbringing between Eastern and Western Europe, my academic interests in feminist and postcolonial studies as well as my religious influences – sandwiched between Catholicism, Islam and confusion – became a key part of my study, opening doors but also at times shutting them in my face. My role was shifting and fluid, one where my similarity to the group members was inseparable from my stark difference to them.

WORKING WITH MUSLIM GROUPS

In the mosque case study I felt a strong distaste towards the amount of research focus being invested into researching Muslims especially by non-Muslim researchers. I wondered how many of those who saw themselves as entitled to study Muslim people (often non-Muslim white people like me) were people who would ‘speak to Muslims’ outside their research project (see Allen 2006). I was aware of the risk of repeating the at best tired and at worst harmful narratives on Muslims. Particularly when researching religious and sexual politics, I wished to move

'beyond the confines of the binary model of subordination and resistance' of Muslims, particularly women, under Islam (Jacobsen 2011: 65). When doing research with Muslim groups, I doubted whether I as a non-Muslim was able to conduct research that I could defend ideologically. The issue of having only been indirectly subjected to Islamophobia through my Muslim family but never experiencing it aimed at me personally, made me aware of my non-Muslim white privilege. The vast majority of Muslims in Poland that I interacted with, however, were also white and ethnically Polish. This certainly made the research with Muslims in Poland different from the research conducted with Muslims by scholars in Western European countries where most Muslims are non-white. Despite the fact that both I and most of the Muslim participants in my study were white and ethnically Polish, grew up in Poland and shared a first language, customs and religion of birth (Catholicism) it was not this sameness that got emphasised in our interactions. Rather, the emphasis was on Islam and my closeness and/or distance from it.

While 'it matters enormously who carries out the research' (Lundy and McGovern 2006: 57), it is also not certain that so called peer-researchers would avoid being placed as 'outsiders' by the participants merely because they identify as Muslims. In fact, when reflecting on peer researchers recruited from within the Muslim community in a project on Muslims Ryan, Kofman, and Aaron (2010) questioned assumptions regarding unproblematic insider status of peer researchers. During the fieldwork process, I went through several stages of being an 'insider' and an 'outsider' leading to the assertion that my position is fluid, shifting and at times confusing, both for me and for the participants. This is also reflected upon by Kobayashi (1994) and Valentine (2002) in their critique of an insider/outsider dualism that 'can never capture the complex experiences and identities of researchers' (Valentine 2002: 117).

Geographers have reflected on their ideological positions and commitments outside of academia, how they motivate an interest in research with sensitive groups and how a researcher's ideological position and commitment to the issues she studies can create a false sense of validity (Cloke et al. 2000). My commitment to the issues I studied went well beyond this particular doctoral project. Closeness to feminist and anti-racist/anti-Islamophobic struggles mark my academic, personal and voluntary

commitments. Yet, my positionality did not automatically grant me access to the field or secure trust, and importantly it did not mean that the participants were willing to engage with me. As Cloke and colleagues observed:

‘Pre-established ideas about the validity of the research will often undergo significant transformation ... when faced as individual researchers with the demystifying experience of explaining the validity of our research’ (Cloke et al. 2000: 139)

For example, despite personally feeling a connection to Muslim groups on many levels and having a strong ideological conviction to work against anti-Muslim racism, I was also carrying the baggage of all previous research on Muslims that made the group ‘over-researched’. In Poland, despite not much research being conducted on Muslims, the group is a small minority that, particularly after events such as the 9/11 and the local Warsaw mosque protests, are continuously asked to take part in media debates.

Reflecting on ethics and reflexivity in their work with vulnerable groups, Cloke et al (2000) suggests that a researcher’s ideological support for those she studies (in Cloke et al’s case homeless people) is sometimes not recognised by the participants themselves. This especially came through when one of the Muslim women shook her head disapprovingly when she heard that I did not identify as a Muslim and said: ‘It is not easy to just become Muslim. It is not your choice, Allah chooses people who are suitable’. This statement created a distance between us – me, the un-chosen one and her, the chosen one. These complex relationships made me realise that despite granting me some access, helping me in my navigation of as well as being key in justifying this choice of case study to myself and others, my relative familiarity with Islam and my investment in anti-racist and anti-Islamophobic politics would not serve as a magic key that would make me ‘part of the group’, far from it. My ideological support for the need to challenge the growing Islamophobia that Muslims face was not always understood as an uncomplicated support:

The minute Antonia sits down in the busy coffee shop among her fellow Muslim sisters and myself, she focuses her gaze on me, piercing through all of the confidence and familiarity with the group I gained in the last five minutes when interacting with the other Muslim women. Are you Muslim? No. Do you want to become Muslim? I... don’t know, no, maybe, some day in the future but not

now. I explained that I am here because of my PhD and implied I do not wish to convert like one of the other 'newbies' that just joined the gathering. Antonia was not satisfied, saying she would never have met me if she knew I was a PhD student (and not a new convert). While I felt frustrated by a dismissal after such a short interaction, I understood that she was tired of yet another researcher potentially asking about her being Muslim. It felt like my lack of Muslimness was a dead-end road for my relationship with Antonia. Since Antonia was only interested in my personal connection to Islam I knew this had to be my 'way in', I had to identify myself in relation to my Muslim husband in order to gain back some of the trust she was willing to give me. The others were also interested about the details of my wedding and general facts about my personal life that were not always comfortable to share with strangers. Yet it was this that connected us. After my first meeting with the sisters I felt confused and stripped of all sorts of identities.

(Participant observation, Muslim women's group, September 2011)

As demonstrated in the observation above, I often 'used' my marital status to gain trust in the hope of being considered with less suspicion. By sharing my marital status and being open with my own complicated religious positionality, I made myself vulnerable for people like Antonia. However reflecting back, to a large extent this had positive outcomes on the relationship between me and the participants.

In their critique of the limited discussion on accompanied fieldwork within the broad literature on positionality and reflexivity, Cupples and Kindon (2003) place an emphasis on the importance of acknowledging the effects that being accompanied potentially has on the fieldwork, particularly on the positionality and power relations within the fieldwork. The fact that I am married to a Muslim man was significant to my relationship with some of my Muslim participants, from the Imam to the Muslim women. Without being physically present in the fieldwork for the overwhelming majority of my field research, my partner was brought up in conversation. His symbolical presence would often be a starter of a deeper conversation or, as it turned out, a start of a friendship. The physical presence of my partner in the field with me at three short and separate time periods, were significant due to the impact his presence in the field had on my relationships with my

participants and the data I gathered. When conducting interviews with an Imam, my position as a married woman and on top of that married to a Muslim man, meant that I was placed ‘within the bounds of acceptable femininity’ (Cupples and Kindon 2003: 220). This, however, did not always feel comfortable. Identifying myself as a feminist meant that my instant usage of my identification as a married woman in order to ‘become respectable’ within a community was problematic and my ‘selling out’ impacted on my personal comfort (Trzebiatowska 2010: 84).

REPRODUCING WHITE RESEARCH ON RACIALISED GROUPS

Being white and working on/with¹⁵ Muslim groups (despite their whiteness but with recognition of their racialisation) raised my doubts as to whether I would only contribute to, through my whiteness, furthering knowledge about non-white groups that are continuously and tediously objectified as Others. Work on racialised groups has historically been conducted by white researchers without acknowledgement of their whiteness and of the unequal power relationship between the researcher and the researched influenced by racism (Lawrence 1982 quoted in Nayak 1999). Usually, whiteness was noted by researchers when their ethnicity marked a barrier in accessing the field (Nayak 1999). In as much as the field of reflexivity has been strengthened since, notably with the important contribution of black and postcolonial feminism and feminist methodologies, research on Muslims within geography seems to be repeating similar problematic patterns. Many researchers studying ‘Muslims identities’ are (to my knowledge¹⁶) non-Muslim and white, located in the West and producing knowledge of Muslims in the West. I am myself broadening this problematic field in my positionality and this requires a moment of scrutiny. It seems as if some of the prominent contributions to knowledge on Muslims and Islam originate from contentious assumptions.

White non-Muslim researchers also keenly speak about how they felt when wearing for example the hijab or the niqab while researching Muslim women¹⁷. Yet they might not be as quick to reflect upon how their act of (un)veiling influenced the

¹⁵ It seems a crucial difference whether research is regarded to be done ‘on’ certain groups or ‘with’ them, yet I am cautious about assuming that my research was conducted ‘with’ groups that had so little power to influence the knowledge produced by me about them, something they could not reciprocate.

¹⁶ Although, as this chapter shows, a researcher’s identities and religious belonging is certainly fluid and there needs to be caution exercised in the labelling of researcher’s identities.

¹⁷ This was observed during a discussion at the Muslims in the UK and Britain Conference (2014) at Cambridge University. A white non-Muslim doing research on the Salafi community talked about her difficulty to flow between roles through her ability to take on/off her hijab.

group dynamics or the sheer possibility of ‘casting off’ their hijab’s when they felt like it. My ‘transformations’ from being a mosque-goer to being a non-Muslim passenger on the 90 bus, as described in the participant observation above, reflected my position of being white and not wearing a hijab or other visual markers that could racialise me as the Muslim Other. This points to the inherent power differences between me and the Muslim participants, particularly the women who wore the hijab, a relationship addressed and challenged in academia in the case of researching black communities yet still prominent in the context of the knowledge produced on Muslims. It seems that there is in geography an ambition to challenge this, yet at times it does not go far enough into challenging its own (liberal, white, non-Muslim) position. For example, work focusing on Muslim identities in the West and particularly Muslim women’s ‘negotiations’ of identity seems at times stuck in the very same narratives it aims to challenge. No doubt well-meaning and rich in their own right, some studies nevertheless introduce an ambition of ‘giving voice’ to Muslims (D. Phillips 2006; K. M. Dunn and Kamp 2009). This ambition assumes a set of troubling geographies produced by those having a voice (non-Muslim and predominantly white scholars) about those assumed not to have a voice (Muslims subalterns) but who are problematically ‘given’ a voice by those who had it in the first place. Concretely, efforts that emphasise heterogeneity of Muslims come close to problematic attempts at humanising the group. A scrutiny of the spaces where this knowledge is constituted seems particularly pressing given that Muslims in academic work are ‘routinely depicted as non-liberal minorities through representations of homophobia, honour killings and forced marriage within their communities’ (Phillips 2012: 21).

Rather than conceptualising my research within frameworks of ‘giving voice’ to Muslims, the three empirical chapters in Part II of the thesis instead focus on the narratives that locate Muslims in a specific temporality (see Butler 2008). With that I do not claim to bypass the power relations between myself and the Muslim participants or to completely avoid reproducing non-problematic research about Muslim groups. Yet I conclude this section by stressing that researchers on Muslims, particularly those who produce research on Muslim women, should take greater note of black, postcolonial and Islamic feminist insights in their approach when producing knowledge about Muslim women.

WORKING WITH CATHOLIC GROUPS

When doing research with Muslim men in the UK, Peter Hopkins (2007) describes the assumptions made about his positionalities, equating his whiteness with Christianity. Perhaps because both the Muslims and I were white and most of us shared a Christian upbringing, this was not a topic of discussion with the Muslim groups. However, it was with the Catholic groups. When I approached Catholics, it was assumed that ‘the Bible was my book’ (Hopkins 2007: 533) and that I at least was somewhat familiar with the Catholic practices. Even if my religious identity could be best described as, following Trzebiatowska, a ‘lapsed Catholic’ (Trzebiatowska 2010: 83), I certainly felt a certain comfort in a Catholic setting. This was rooted in my personal history of spending the best parts of my youthful Sundays on a Church bench. For someone born at the very beginning of the 1980s in Gdansk in the midst of the Solidarity movement and with the prominence of the Catholic church in the anti-Communist opposition of the time, there was no way to escape going to Church as a child, even if one wanted to (also see Trzebiatowska 2010).

My Catholic upbringing and the fact that I married a person who practises a faith, has meant that, despite my own lack of practice, religious belief is significant to me and echoing Lynn Davidman I have ‘come to terms and reintegrated my own’ Catholic background into my identity (Davidman 2000: 426). The notion of ‘familiar stranger’ in the context of Catholicism is in my case not dissimilar to other researchers who were born and raised within a religious tradition but since moving away from their country of origin, did not maintain their religious practice (Trzebiatowska 2010; Chong 2008). However, similarly to Trzebiatowska’s reflections in her study with Catholic nuns, there were confrontations that disrupted my position of a ‘familiar stranger’ (Trzebiatowska 2010). This was particularly evident in my interactions with Catholic activists. Recognising that lived religion is a part of people’s everyday lives and not confined to certain spaces only, I had some encounters where I was confronted with my assumed Catholic faith in places I did not expect it. After a pro-life focus group that I conducted in someone’s home I found a stoup mounted for holy water by the front door something I had never seen outside church. Another example when my Catholicism was tested was during one of the pro-life demonstrations:

At the start of the demonstration, that turned out to be a vigil, everyone dug their prayer beads out of their pockets or purses and started praying. Not knowing the prayers by heart, I was relieved not to be equipped with prayer beads as this, I thought, meant that I did not have to partake in the vigil. This feeling of relief only lasted a few minutes as one particularly helpful demonstrator walked up to me and handed me a set of prayer beads 'you can have my spare one'. Awkwardly, I thanked him and held on to the prayer beads staring at the poster of an aborted fetus.

(Participant observation, pro-life demonstration, January 2012)

On a couple of occasions the Catholic participants felt the need to know of my religious belonging to know how to answer my questions. In the beginning of one focus group, one participant stopped in the middle of a sentence and turned to me asking:

Fabian: I'm sorry to ask, but are you a person that believes?

Kasia: (pause) ... Yes, but I'm not practicing really, meaning I don't go to Church... every Sunday...

Fabian: So you got some sort of an idea of God, okay.

(Pro-life Catholic focus group)

In this example, Fabian was satisfied with my vague answer because it helped him to position me religiously, even if roughly, and allowed him to assume a certain commonality between us which impacted on the sort of information that could be revealed to me. My answers, particularly when caught by surprise, would often but not always, mean that I somehow 'passed' as legitimate enough. Yet there were times when participants engaged more in my personal religious belonging, for example advising me that it would be beneficial for me to start attending Church regularly. When reflecting upon a similar exchange, Pratt describes the experience as a 'momentary crisis' in the relationship between the researcher and the participants (2002). Such moments were not exclusively part of my interactions with religious groups. Surprisingly the groups I thought I would fit into most easily presented a significant challenge.

WORKING WITH POLISH FEMINISTS GROUPS

Most of the pro-choice participants in the abortion case study were feminists, a group I assumed I had access to. It was obvious to me that because of our shared identity as feminists, the group would be the easiest to recruit. However making connections with people who ‘superficially appear to have much in common’ with oneself can be misleading (Valentine 2002: 123). Some of the encounters with the pro-choice feminists pointed to the importance of recognising that ‘many layers of sameness and difference can be operating at the same time’ (Valentine 2002: 122). In the work with feminist groups, our main point of difference was the fact that I was educated and lived in a Western country (Sweden), while my participants were educated and living in a Central and Eastern-European country (Poland). The history of gender relations and the current gender norms and laws vary between all countries. Yet there are certain assumptions about a progressive ‘developed’ West and a ‘backward’ East that are evident in narratives around gender relations in Poland. Particularly in terms of the issue of abortion, all of the pro-choice feminists I encountered lamented on the situation in Poland and often contrasted it to the situation in the West, and particularly Sweden, where they perceived there to be gender equality. At the same time there was also frustration about the Western-centric view of Polish feminism especially within academia that my participants had encountered through their own studies or academic work. Some of these women felt the need to ‘inform’ me about the complex workings of women’s resistance in Poland within the specific historical and cultural context. During these conversations, I felt that while we shared ideas about gender equality, geographical, historical and cultural distance was created between us through the East/West narratives and unequal power relations that, historically and to this day, influenced our interactions.

WORKING WITH ISLAMOPHOBIC GROUPS

Researchers working with vulnerable groups have expressed ‘experiencing fear’ during their research (Cloke et al. 2000: 144). With regards to finding oneself in such uncomfortable, and sometimes scary, situations, Cloke et al reflect that:

‘The very process of inviting ourselves in as outsiders carries with it inherent discomfort and fears, which demand safe research practices, but also erode just a little the protective socio-positional armour with which we often surround ourselves’ (Cloke et al 2000)

Due to ethical considerations and considerations for my own safety, I decided not to conduct interviews with explicitly far-right groups. Nevertheless, the participants in my study made frequent Islamophobic and racist remarks. On most occasions I fitted in, being white and not visibly Muslim. Questions testing my own position towards the mosque and Muslims were infrequent. When they did come up, however, participants allowed me enough space to respond noncommittally. This is one such exchange:

Sylwia: And are you for or against [the mosque]? Or are you indifferent?

Kasia: I try and be... I am a little indifferent because of the fact that I don't live here [in Poland].

Sylwia: Exactly.

Kasia: But I live in England and now I live in York which is a town up north where there are basically no mosques. But when I lived in London there were a lot of mosques and it was different...

Sylwia: One plus or minus doesn't matter, right?

Kasia: Yes it doesn't make much difference. Mm...

(Sylwia, paired interview)

During one focus group with mosque opponents, the respondents brought up my personal profile page on a travel forum called *Couchsurfing*¹⁸. The negative attitudes of the respondents towards non-white people and Muslims reflected on my position within the group, despite my whiteness. After telling me about their hesitation with regards to inviting people of colour to their home, one of the respondents turned to me and hinted that the group was aware of my cohabiting with a non-white person.

Kasia: And would that bother you, if your neighbour would be Muslim... or maybe even a flatmate?

Wiktor: I would be very keen to meet a person like that.

(Patrycja shakes her head)

Kasia: No, Patrycja?

¹⁸ *Couchsurfing* is a global community of travelers who host travelers, communicating via an online network site. My personal *Couchsurfing* profile has a picture of myself and my husband, who has got Indian heritage.

Patrycja: No, we are active in the Couchsurfing and we read the profiles of members [whispering to me: 'we also read your profile']. And once we accepted a guy from India and generally we are not accepting anyone aside from Europeans...

(Ochota locals, focus group)

The group's disapproval of my *Couchsurfing* profile loomed in the tone, smile and gaze of my participants. While not expressed threateningly but rather acknowledging the potential awkwardness between us, the comment made nevertheless made me feel out of place. This was, as Nayak (1999) has shown, a subtle way of calling into question my cultural loyalties.

CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined the methodological approaches of the study, rooted in mixed qualitative methods. The core part of the chapter focussed on the complex issues around my positionality when working with conflicted groups. My role as researcher involved moving between and across competing groups which marks the thesis' original contribution.

Negotiating trust and access to each of the groups without compromising my own ideological commitments to this study was at times emotionally challenging. As my experiences suggest, working across conflicted groups requires a flexibility of the researcher to adapt to situations where one's positionalities are questioned and tested.

I echo Marta Trzebiatowska's (2010: 94) reflection that 'the researcher's religious/spiritual biography can be a blessing and a curse'. My Catholicism was very different from the Catholicism of many of my participants. Similarly, even though I do not identify as a Muslim, my connection to the religion and its followers is different to that of many non-Muslim researchers that engage in research on Islam, as it is to the Muslims I interacted with in Warsaw. My identity as a feminist stretched beyond assumptions of shared ideas and goals of opposing patriarchy. Here, the issues of being a Western-educated feminist working in a post-Communist country like Poland was significant in forming links and unveiling differences with feminists on the ground. Lastly, my personal circumstances made my research with Islamophobic and racist groups at times emotionally draining. Many researchers conduct studies within their own religious or ethnic communities emphasising that

their position as ‘insiders’ grants them access to the groups they are studying (see Tse 2013). For those researchers that are less stable in their religious identification, having switched alliances or returning to a once abandoned religious community, such research can be particularly challenging (see Trzebietowska 2010). If my own religious autobiography was confused prior to the research, it has throughout the research project been through many trials; rising, falling, changing. When Justin Wilford (2012) presented his research on Mega Churches in the USA, he was vague about his own religious positionality. What I initially read as a methodological shortcoming, I now sympathise with. A researcher’s religious autobiography can often be a place of confusion and uncertainty, one that is constantly changing, especially when conducting in-depth research with different, and conflicting, religious groups. As has been the case in this study, it is those researchers who walk the line between established religious traditions and battle with their own spirituality that are tested the most by the religious communities they research.

MOSQUE CASE STUDY

The mosque case study is comprised of the three chapters that follow this introductory section. The chapters are set against a history of Islam that has been present in Poland for centuries and evidences predominantly amicable cohabitation with few known or documented antagonisms throughout this history. It is the past recollected in this introduction that serves as a point of departure for the forthcoming chapters. The historical emphasis on religious tolerance and coexistence, and more so, an emphasis on structures that went beyond coexistence suggesting religious friendships across the three main faiths in Poland, functions here as a frame of reference to which the forthcoming chapters will at times refer back.

SITUATING THE CONTEXT

On Friday everyone met at the imam's house, on Saturday they all met at the rabbi's house and on Sunday they met at the priest's house. The religious tolerance was very strong.

Imam (individual interview)

Narrations about the history of Islam in Poland often begin with an idyllic historical image of inter-faith relations where curiosity, dialogue and political friendships between Catholics, Jews and Muslims flourished. Despite some cracks in the romanticised history of Polish Islam, the imam's quote brings to life a 600 year old legacy in what was a country of mixed religious adherence. Today much of this is a rarely resurrected nostalgic memory with a weakening bearing on the current religious landscape of Poland where Muslims are small in number and anti-Muslim prejudice is becoming increasingly evident across the country.

Poland's Muslim population stretches to no more than 0.08% (Jędrzyk 2010), any protests caused by fear of Muslims in Poland would be 'Islamophobia without Muslims' (P. Escobar 2010). However as has been noted in the literature, and as I will show in the forthcoming chapters, anti-Muslim discourses are not solely confined to areas where there are large Muslim settlements or historical antipathies to Islam (Bjorgo 1997). Despite its size, the Muslim community in Poland is diverse with Tatars, migrants from Muslim countries and converts representing a variety of Muslim traditions. In Warsaw, there are Shia, Sunni, Sufi and Ahmadiyya Muslim groups represented across ten different organisations. The largest of these Muslim organisations is the Muslim League (LM) consisting of Muslims of Arab descent and converts. The second largest and the oldest Muslim organisation in Poland is the Muslim Religious Association (MZR) that is historically Tatar but currently attracts other Muslims as well.

In this introduction I set the context and the framework, for the three forthcoming chapters. I start by discussing the first Muslim presence in the Polish lands, highlighting the very different religious genealogy of Islam in Poland as compared to its genealogy in many countries in Western Europe. Historical attentiveness to the Polish history of Islam opens up possibilities for different, perhaps more hopeful,

readings of the emerging Islamophobic trends that can be used to challenge more oppressive narratives of conflict.

THE TATARS: A 600 YEAR OLD HERITAGE

Muslims have been in Poland since the 14th century (Antonowicz-Bauer 1984). The first presence of Islam in the then Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth can be traced back to the arrival of the Tatars from the Islamic regions of the Golden Horde; spread between Volga, Caucasus, Crimea and the north of the Sea of Azov (Antonowicz-Bauer 1984: 346). This Tatar presence in Poland of approximately 70,000 people increased with further migration in the 17th century at which point there were an estimated 100,000 Tatars in the Polish territories (Antonowicz-Bauer 1984). The Tatars settled in what was then the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and later became the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. They arrived as members of a powerful horde of families migrating due to civil wars and dynastic tensions. Some early Tatars also came as prisoners of war or mercenaries who served as warriors in their new homeland¹⁹ (Szajkowski 1999; Antonowicz-Bauer 1984). Antonowicz-Bauer (1984) emphasised a Polish openness to others, evidenced in the early laws on religious freedom. This openness was mobilised by the liberal rule of the Jagiełło dynasty and materialised in the 1573 Warsaw Confederation, a pioneering formalisation of religious tolerance law in Europe securing religious freedoms for Muslims (Antonowicz-Bauer 1984). At that time, Poland was ethnically and religiously diverse with groups of Tatars, Jews, Armenians and Germans living together in what then were Polish territories. Throughout the centuries, there was little recorded discrimination against the Muslim minority (Dziekan 2011) apart from a significant period of religious discrimination shortly after the accelerated migration of Tatars to the Polish lands at the beginning of the 17th century (Dziekan 2011). All restrictions to mosque building and renovation were lifted after this period and a complete freedom to erect mosques was enshrined in the Constitution in 1768 (Konopacki 2010).

¹⁹ This was encouraged by Władysław II Jagiełło asked the Tatars for military assistance against the Teutonic Knights (Kopański 2009)

MOSQUES

There are scant records of how many mosques have historically existed in the Polish territories, estimates range between 60 to 400 mosques²⁰ (Nalborczyk and Borecki 2011; Szajkowski 1999). The first presence of a mosque in Poland was noted in the 16th century. It was a wooden mosque in Sorok Tatory - one of the first Muslim settlements in the region²¹ (Kopański 2009). Funds for mosque constructions and Muslim cemeteries as well as gardens used by mullahs and muezzins were granted by the local non-Muslim population (Antonowicz-Bauer 1984; Nalborczyk 2011).

The significant-looking wooden mosques scattered around the Polish landscape were part of the material and symbolic make-up of the country. The old Tatar mosques had a typical architecture of their time, having more in common with the local churches rather than mosques found across the Muslim world. This is because the Polish mosque designs at the time were both conceptually influenced by Catholic and Orthodox churches and physically built by the same carpenters that constructed churches at the time (Nalborczyk 2011). The Tatars kept their faith and practices, yet incorporated Polish traditions into their own. In the multi-ethnic Polish landscape, such religious negotiations were not uncommon.

Polish history paints an image of religious and ethnic diversity, difficult to conceptualise when looking to the current religious and ethnic make-up of the country. Up until the Second World War, Poland was a country of many different ethnic groups. In the inter-war years, for example, Jewish people made up approximately 10% of the population. But Poland was soon to lose its heterogeneity, becoming one of the most ethnically and religiously homogenous countries in the world (Podemski 2012). Polish Muslims were resettled and according to Dziekan (2011) some Tatars were killed by the Nazi forces. After the war Poland went from being a country with 35% of ethnic and national minorities (Jewish, Muslim, Roma) to only 2%, becoming almost homogenous (Tomaszewski 1985).

Whilst the Jewish population was virtually wiped out in Poland as the result of anti-Semitism, the main reason for the decline in the Muslim population in Poland was

²⁰ Ibrahim Peczewi, a Turkish historian, states that between 1520-1639 there were 60 Tatar settlements in Poland, each with its own mosque (Antonowicz-Bauer 1984).

²¹ While some sources claim that the mosques stood until 1939 (Nalborczyk 2011), a more extensive historical account suggest that the mosque got demolished by Soviet regime in 1945 (Marcinkowski 2009)

not Islamophobia. Instead it was due to a change in the Polish borders that transferred a large part of Polish lands to the Soviet Union that heavily affected the regions inhabited by the Tatars. Most Polish Tatars found themselves on the Soviet side of the new border (Włoch 2009). Two small Polish Tatar villages, Kruszyniany and Bohoniki, situated in the eastern border with Belarus, continue the Tatar religious and cultural heritage in Poland today. Each village is home to a 19th century wooden mosque, still in use by the Tatar community. Both of these mosques were refurbished with government funds in the late 1960s and to this day serve the small Tatar community that live in the surrounding area (Pędziwiatr 2011a). Today, there are three purpose-built mosques left in Poland; in addition to the mosques in Kruszyniany and Bohoniki another mosque was built in the 1980s in Gdansk. There are also several non-purpose built prayer spaces scattered across the country.

The construction of the Tatar purpose-built mosque in Gdansk was started in 1984 by the MZR and was completed in 1989. One reason for the long construction process was the political situation in Poland during the final years of Communist rule. It was not local opposition to the concept of the mosque that delayed the construction but rather the limited availability of building material in the failing Communist economy. In fact, as Nalborczyk writes, the Tatars behind the mosque construction got help from Polish Catholics and collaborated with a local church (Nalborczyk 2011).

At the time of my fieldwork (2011-2012) the first purpose-built mosque in Warsaw was under construction. Despite being home to 10,000 Muslims, Warsaw did not have a single purpose-built mosque at the time. In the interwar years, the Tatars had plans to build a mosque in the capital (Dziekan 2011; Nalborczyk and Borecki 2011; Pędziwiatr 2011a). The arrival of the Second World War however was detrimental to this ambition. While the need for the mosque was still there after the war, the need to rebuild the almost levelled capital city was greater so the Tatars donated the funds gathered for the new mosque towards the regeneration of the city (Szajkowski 1999; Nalborczyk and Borecki 2011). In 1993 a residential home in Warsaw was converted into a prayer space and now functions as the main mosque in the capital. The new purpose built mosque currently under construction in the Ochota neighbourhood (that is at the focus for this study) marks a significant turning point

in the history of Polish Islam. The more recent history of Islam in Poland has been influenced by its more recent migrants, Muslims originating in Arab countries²².

THE ARABS: REMAKING POLISH ISLAM

Despite the ‘closed borders’ and isolation from much of the world during the Communist years, a significant Muslim migration from ‘befriended’ countries took place during Communism. Interestingly, when Poland opened its borders after 1989, there was no significant (Muslim) migration to the country (Górak-Sosnowska 2011). Arab students from countries such as Palestine, Kuwait, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Iraq arrived to study at Polish universities (Pędziwiatr 2011b). Many of the students decided to stay in Poland and form families with Poles²³, similarly to how the Tatars did upon arrival to Poland. Today the group is generally of middle- and upper classes (Górak-Sosnowska 2011).

Even though they arrived in Poland many centuries apart, and while generally not compared to each other, and quick to stress their differences, the experiences of the Tatars and the Arabs in Poland bear many similarities. Both the Tatars and the Arabs quickly occupied the middle- or upper classes in Polish society and possess today a wealth of symbolic capital. Most Arab migration to Poland took place before the fall of the Communist regime. Upon arrival, the Muslim students quickly started organising places of worship. Muslim prayer halls were established in various locations; at universities, in people’s homes and in rented accommodation (Pędziwiatr 2011). At that time, in the 1980s before there were established prayer facilities in the major Polish cities, this often meant finding private rooms with the help of university staff:

The brothers arranged to have a room on the top floor of the student halls. It was not a room for other students but like an attic, and the director of the student hall agreed for that room to be a prayer space... And it was similar in other cities like Lublin, in Poznań, in Katowice, in Wrocław... it started with someone offering up their room for Friday

²² I realise that using the terms ‘Tatars’ and ‘Arabs’ could be reductive, particularly since many of the Muslim migrants to Poland consider themselves Polish, Polish Tatars/Arabs or Polish Muslims. Such a division however does dominate in the Polish literature concerning the two groups and facilitates the discussion about the groups’ different histories and relative division in the Polish Muslim ummah.

²³ As most Muslim migrants to Poland, both in the case of Tatars and the Arabs, were male, they usually married Polish women. This certainly facilitated the language capabilities and the symbolic capital of the Muslim students.

prayers or the directors of those student halls designated a room in the building for the Muslim students to pray in.

Were there any issues?

No issues at all... Because the director or the female director had good relations with these [Muslim] students, so they gave them rooms when asked... And already then Muslims started thinking that they wanted to have mosques and the activity started going in this direction. There was on the one hand the Muslim Religious Association [Tatar organisation] and also the Muslim Student Association in Poland [Student association with mostly Arab students]

(Imam, individual interview)

As the imam recalled, since the arrival of the Arab migrants, many smaller prayer halls were established and some key Muslim centres were formed in cities such as Warsaw, Łódź, Wrocław, Katowice, Kraków, Poznań, Lublin, and Białystok – all branches of the Muslim League (Pedziwiatr 2011). The Muslim League (LM) comprising of Arab Muslim migrants, converts and international students is both bigger in terms of numbers and more resourceful than the Tatar Muslim Religious Organisation (MZR) (Pedziwiatr 2011). It is the Muslim League who are behind the initiative to build the first purpose-built mosque in the capital that is the focus for this study. The Tatars are considered by the Muslim League as neglectful of their faith (Łyszczarz 2011). Yet the Tatars still hold the more prominent role in Poland, serving as the official representatives of the Muslim community in the country²⁴.

POST 9/11 GLOBAL CONTEXT

The terrorist attacks in the USA, the UK and Spain over the last decade unleashed moral panic regarding Islam and Muslims (Kong, Olson, and Hopkins 2013). Re-enactments of hegemonic discourses and interventions have since been frequently mobilised in the name of the ‘war on terror’. Central to these interventions are concerns about Muslim people’s shaky allegiance to the West through the rhetoric of Otherness that operates as a mechanism for the exclusion of those marked as different (Brown 2006).

While the events of 9/11 do not mark the starting point for anti-Muslim prejudice, the post 9/11 war on terror has greatly escalated this prejudice (Maira 2011). Leila Ahmed (2011: 193) recounts the war on terror as having ‘sparked new levels of

²⁴ While Tatars are not in focus for this thesis, it is of value to nuance the history of Islam in Poland with such intra-group tensions.

suspicion of Muslims in the Western world' as evidenced by the wars initiated by the Western powers on a global scale and the growing number of violent attacks on Muslim minorities more locally, particularly targeted against Muslim women wearing hijab residing in Western countries. From the Swedish far-right party's election campaign video portraying an elderly lady overtaken on her way to claim her pension by a group of burqa-clad women, to the minaret and headscarf ban in Switzerland and France, the pernicious and persistent discourse on Islam as Europe's Other has permeated Western Europe. Such discourses reflect recycled colonial narratives emphasising familiar binaries between the West and the Muslim Rest (Hopkins 2009) and as such are a continuation of imperialism expressed in new forms (R. Phillips 2009).

In the last two decades following the end of the Cold War, civilisational conflicts have been recast and the focus shifted towards Islam and the challenge it presents to triumphant Western notions of 'the end of history' (Fukuyama 1989). Samuel Huntington's (1993) influential 'clash of civilisations' thesis regarding the shift from territorial to cultural conflicts captured this sentiment. Huntington, focusing on Islam, argues that culture is replacing ideology in post-Cold War conflicts or as he summarises it; an iron curtain of ideology is replaced by a velvet curtain of culture (Huntington 2003). Huntington's problematic yet influential essay draws heavily on Bernard Lewis' 1990 article 'The Roots of Muslim Rage' and was recently recycled in the magazine *Newsweek* (Newsweek 2012) portraying a stereotypical image of Muslim men in traditional Muslim clothing (R. Lewis 2009). Mamdani (2004:20) says about Huntington's vision: 'the ideological war we have come to know as the Cold War was but a parochial curtain-raiser for a truly global conflict for which the "West" will need to marshal the entire range of its cultural resources'. As Mamdani puts it, after 9/11 the emphasis on culture 'focuses on Islam and Muslims who presumably made culture at the beginning of creation, as some extraordinary, prophetic act. After that, it seems Muslims just conformed to culture' (Mamdani 2004: 18). Richard Phillips argues that today biological differences have been recast to signify difference through religion and culture (Phillips 2009). Wendy Brown argues that the current division lies between 'those who are said to be ruled by culture and those who are said to rule themselves but enjoy culture' (Brown 2006: 20). Culture, then, is reduced to something fixed, static, monolithic and repressive to

those ruled by it and something free and chosen to those that are ‘above’ it. As will be evidenced in the forthcoming chapters the adherence to civilisational rhetoric serves to bring together seemingly unlikely allies. The hegemonic constructions of Islam outlined above vary between different contexts and are not reproduced in the same ways across all Western countries (Phillips 2009). However, these discourses are not divorced from (Western) histories of imperialism and reflect specific geopolitical and historical settings. While produced in certain sites, Islamophobic narratives echo well beyond the original sites of tensions and emergence. The Western constructed discourses generate a focus on Islam that permeates countries that have had amicable historical relationship with Islam, as demonstrated by the recent conflicts over Islam in the Polish public sphere.

While my study focuses on the tensions in Warsaw over two mosque constructions, it is notable that Muslim communities in other Polish cities, such as the old Tatar villages with the 19th century wooden mosque, have also recently been attacked and vandalised.

MOSQUE CONFLICTS IN WARSAW

In 2010 the Muslim League²⁵ publicly announced plans to construct the first purpose-built mosque in the Ochota district of Warsaw. As a response to the planned construction, an anti mosque protest was organised in March 2010. The Ochota opposition was mainly orchestrated by the liberal secularist group Europe of the Future [Europa Przyszłości] who articulated their opposition in terms of the values of democracy, freedom of expression and women’s rights.

Shortly thereafter, a second mosque construction plan was put forward by a different Muslim group, the Ahmadiyya community, in the neighbouring Włochy district. This project, eventually rejected by the local council, was opposed by the majority of the small local community in the Włochy neighbourhood.

The anticipated mosque constructions fuelled a multitude of television and newspaper debates about Muslims, Islam, terrorism and ‘our’ versus ‘their’ values (Jędrzyk Miłada, 2010; Rzeczpospolita, 2010). The mosque projects were not so much marking a new presence of Muslims in the capital as a new visibility at a time

²⁵ The Muslim League is one of two official Muslim organisations in Poland. It was founded 2001, led by an Arab migrant to Poland and attracts mainly Arab migrants, students and Polish converts.

of increased moral panic regarding Islam and the presence of Muslims in Europe. The media reported on the alleged terrorist links of the Muslim groups and on the fear of local residents regarding creeping Islamisation in both neighbourhoods. Some of the headlines from the main daily newspapers marking a new conflict in the Polish public sphere read:



FIGURE A. PART I: SITUATING THE CONTEXT. PRESS CUTTINGS: MOSQUE CASE STUDY CUTTINGS, PROTEST LETTERS AND LOCAL COUNCIL DOCUMENTS REGARDING OCHOTA AND WŁOCHY MOSQUE CONSTRUCTIONS, 2010-2012. COPYRIGHT: KASIA NARKOWICZ

‘Who did the Muslim group collaborate with?’ (Rzeczpospolita 2010), ‘Fortification of Islam?’ [Reduta islamu?] (Nasz Dziennik 2010), ‘They don’t want a mosque in Warsaw’ (Gazeta 2010), ‘A mosque, a paediatrician and radical Islamists’ (Rzeczpospolita 2010), ‘Mosque in Warsaw – the first tension’ (Bodakowski 2011) and ‘Włochy does not want a mosque’ (Jędrzyk 2010).

The media discourses in Poland point to a transformation in the way stories about Muslims have been reported. According to Weiner (2007), the concept of ethnic and religious difference has been discussed in Poland solely in relation to events happening in Western Europe such as the London bombings or France’s urban riots (Weinar 2007).

CASE STUDY STRUCTURE

The first chapter (*A Calling for a Place in the City*) looks at the spatial politics around mosques as material and symbolic spaces that facilitate inclusion and exclusion. The second chapter (*Strange Allies*) focuses on resistance to the mosques and, more broadly, to Muslims and Islam through gender and sexual politics that function as key proxies for Islam's Otherness. The third and final chapter in the case study (*Spaces of Tension, Spaces of Hope*) maps the secular and the religious in the mosque conflicts, challenging spaces of exclusion and enquiring about spaces of hope (see Harvey 2000; Phillips 2009). In the conclusion to the thesis I return to the Tatar legacy, asking what foundation, if any, it offers upon which the current conflicts can be challenged. I will ask if the long and positive history of Islam is only a fading memory or whether it can be resurrected to create possibilities of agonistic politics and political friendships among different groups in the Polish public sphere. It is against the specificity of the Polish context and away from the borrowed narratives, that the conclusion will be formed.

CHAPTER 4.

A CALLING FOR A PLACE:

MOSQUE CONFLICT & SPATIAL CONTESTATIONS

I am in Warsaw and I want to see churches and hear church bells... I want to live in this culture I do not want to hear church bells from one side and the Muslim call for prayer from the other side.

Sasha, Ochota neighbourhood

Sylwia: The area is not adapted for it [the mosque]

Krystyna: Will they come with cars or how, I don't know what transport they use! There are no parking spaces allocated... where should all this take place?

Sylwia and Krystyna, Włochy neighbourhood

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the resistance to mosque building in Warsaw, looking closely at spatial contestations over the construction of Muslim spaces of worship in the Włochy and Ochota neighbourhoods. The chapter develops some of the main research aims of this thesis by looking at how the mosques were contested in public space as well as through public space. The chapter sheds light on the claims underpinning the mosque opposition and discusses how these are used to facilitate claims of Muslim Otherness that further function to underpin exclusionary attitudes towards Muslims. In this chapter the focus is on ways that Muslim groups were marked as 'out of place' through the material and symbolic presence of the mosque. The chapter looks at ways in which the symbolic affects the material and vice versa in maintaining dominant norms, ideologies and hegemonies (Cresswell 1996; Watson 2005). In this chapter I also focus on visual and sonic geographies, particularly mosque architecture as being 'out of place' (Naylor and Ryan 2002), and the azan as an 'alien' sound (Gale 2004). Recognising how the spatial and the temporal are interrelated, continuously produced and reproduced as well as implicated in the production of a certain history (Massey 1992), I situate the Warsaw mosque tensions within the broader debate on Islamophobia. The conflicts are understood as a new phenomenon in Poland and analysed against the long history of un-opposed mosque presence in the country.

This chapter opens with a critical reflection about the very definition of a mosque, which despite being located at the centre of the conflict is rarely defined in

academic literature on mosque conflicts, and especially not with reference to Islamic liturgy. It concludes with a discussion that traces some of the resistance towards mosque construction to a sense of loss rooted in uneven politics in the city of Warsaw.

'WHAT IS IT?' DEFINING MUSLIM SPACE

A specific tension that arose as part of the Ochota mosque conflict related to the formal definition of the construction, or in this case, a lack of one. An issue prominent in the Ochota neighbourhood²⁶ was the perceived lack of clarity about what the construction on the plot actually was; a mosque, a cultural centre or something else? While there was no doubt that a Muslim group planned a construction in a known location on *Żwirowa* street next to the *Zesłańców Syberyjskich* roundabout in Warsaw, it was less well understood what this construction constituted. This lack of clarity caused confusion and irritation among local residents and inspired suspicion and anxiety towards the Muslim group but also more broadly towards Muslims and Islam. This section attempts to nuance some of these anxieties by problematising the very definition of a mosque.

A MOSQUE OR A CULTURAL CENTRE?

The construction plan received by the council in Ochota from the Muslim League was granted for the construction of a 'Centre for Muslim culture with a prayer space' (President of Warsaw Office 2008). The official description for the construction was reminiscent of a similar project in the Italian city of Lodi where a Muslim group applied for building permission and the word 'mosque' was never used. Instead, the construction of a 'Centre for Islamic Culture' was described as having a 'special space to be used as a prayer room' (Saint-Blancat and Schmidt di Friedberg 2005: 1087) . In Poland, several media outlets referred to the construction as a 'cultural centre with a mosque' (Szymanik 2010). This ostensibly minor difference in description was significant in stoking the confusion felt among the participants regarding whether the construction was a mosque or a cultural centre with a prayer space. The confusion regarding what the mosque was, was perceived as at best clumsy miscommunication and at worst an intentional attempt to deceive

²⁶ This was much less evident in Włochy. As the Włochy mosque project was rejected, the specific architecture cannot be analysed in the same way in this section.

on the part of Muslims, further fuelling scepticism towards the construction of a Muslim space.

A local councillor in Ochota, who presented a favourable attitude of the old Muslim community in Poland, the Tatars, responded negatively to the documentation that the council received from the Muslim group. The absence of particular wording, in this case of calling the construction ‘a mosque’ was a trigger to the councillor:

‘I do not like deception and that was the issue since the very beginning. If I would be building a church then I would say it is a church, a prayer house for Catholics with church bells and with a height of this many metres. And everyone knows what it is, right? ... If I wanted to build a church with a bell tower I would not write in my project proposal that I would build a little house with a little bell right? (Laughs)... It says centre of Islamic culture with a prayer space and there is nothing said here that it will be a mosque!’

(Local councillor, Ochota neighbourhood)

The councillor’s narrative demonstrated a disjunction between the positive history of Islam in Poland and the recent tensions devoid of a historical continuity. This is reminiscent of research conducted in Sydney, where charges of deception against Muslim communities were used by some to heighten local anxiety about what exactly it is that is being built (Dunn 2001). Europe of the Future argued that the councillors were misinformed about the construction because, as they argued in the media ‘the plan was only to build a cultural centre in the neighbourhood – without a mosque’ (Machajski and Urzykowski 2010). They went one step further in relating this perceived deception around the definition of the project to accusations regarding the lack of clarity regarding the sponsorship of the project:

We do not know who the mosque sponsor is. [Name removed] told the papers that the name of the mosque sponsor is known to the authorities but then the authorities said they do not know... this means that someone is lying here... this is a question of credibility of a person.

(Andrzej, individual interview)

While acknowledging the confusion regarding the definition of the construction a Muslim focus group did not regard the vagueness around the definition as something unusual, not to mention as something suspicious. For some Muslims, what mattered most was that they have a space to pray; with their current mosque physically incapable of accommodating the congregation a larger space was

required. To them, the concerns of the non-Muslim participants felt like a provocation:

Asia: A group of people who tried to force through provocation [were] saying that there was an agreement... for a Muslim Cultural Centre and not a mosque!

Dagmara: There will be prayers there and teachings and obviously whether it is called an apartment, a centre of dialogue or a mosque...

Asia: For us it doesn't matter!

Dagmara: The prayer will happen five times a day anywhere, wherever Muslims will gather.

Aisha: Even in the park behind the bench! (Bursts out laughing)

(Muslim women, focus group)

The laughter ending the quote above derives from the memory entertained by Aisha of the numerous experiences of attempting to secure prayer spaces in public. For Polish Muslims prayer spaces are not always mosques, but what becomes a temporary mosque is someone's flat, a university cleaning cupboard as Aisha experienced or, as in the case of one Muslim woman I met - her boss' office. To the Muslim women, emphasis on what the place that they pray in was called was not as important or fixed as it seemed to be for some of the non-Muslim participants. This was partly rooted in being a minority religion in a place with very few mosques spread across a big city, forcing Muslims to find places for their daily prayers at work and sometimes in public spaces across Warsaw, such as behind a bench. But even more than being merely a necessity for Muslims in Poland, flexibility around a definition of what constitutes a mosque is rooted in a deeper Islamic tradition (Saleem 2012; Nasser 2005).

When asking what is going to be built in their neighbourhood, the participants touched upon broader issues that many Muslim groups across Europe grapple with in the midst of mosque constructions in their non-Muslim majority neighbourhoods, such as: what is a mosque and what makes a mosque a mosque? (Kasmani 2014). Lily Kong (2010) pointed out in her recent review on geographies of religion that there has been a significant geographical focus on mosques in non-Muslim countries (Allievi 2009; Gilliat-Ray and Birt 2010; Naylor and Ryan 2002; Cesari 2005; Jonker 2005; McLoughlin 2005; Gale 2005; Saint-Blancat and Schmidt di Friedberg

2005; T. Schmitt 2012; Tamimi Arab 2012, Tamimi Arab 2013a). The recent trend in Western European scholarship of studies on mosque conflicts in different cities demonstrates however a near absence of engagement with Islamic liturgy. Apart from McLouglin's (2005) and Tamimi Arab's (2013, 2012) contributions, none of the studies make reference to the broader Islamic tradition and key Islamic sources, such as the Quran and the Hadith. Divorcing discussions of mosque conflicts from conceptualisations of sacred space seems a limitation and restriction in gaining a fuller understanding that stretches beyond familiar debates on mosque opposition. Looking towards the Islamic interpretations of sacred space, allows for a richer, if more complex and complicated, analysis and goes some way towards suggesting more nuanced reasons for the diversity of definitions of the construction in Ochota proposed by the Warsaw Muslim community.

FLUIDITY OF A MOSQUE

The lack of clarity regarding the Warsaw mosque construction is linked to questions more intrinsic to the Islamic tradition than the Warsaw residents anticipated. In the Hadith, a mosque is described holistically. It stretches the understanding beyond the conformity of material walls:

“The whole earth being a mosque, prayers may be offered anywhere, singly or in congregation, and accordingly no consecration of the mosque is necessary” (Al-Bukhari 2004)

The mosque occupies an important space in the Islamic tradition, but whilst it is a respected space, it is not defined as holy (Kasmani 2013). Within Islam, a mosque is defined as a space where Muslim people pray. The word mosque, *masjid* in Arabic, is derived from the word *sajada*, prostration (Kasmani 2014). According to Erzen (2011) the Islamic prayer can be observed almost anywhere. The Islamic understanding of the mosque encompasses any space that is clean and indicating the direction of prayer. According to architect Shahed Saleem, a mosque could be a line in the desert sand (Belton 2010). As stated in the Quran:

“And from wheresoever you start forth (for prayers), turn your face in the direction of Al-masjid-Al-Haram (at Makkah), and wheresoever you are, turn your faces towards it (when you pray)” (Khalidi: 2:150)

The main book of Hadith contains encouragements for the establishment of mosques, such as demonstrated in the fragment below, yet does not engage with the specifics as to a mosque's aesthetic form:

"Whoever builds a mosque, desiring thereby Allāh's pleasure, Allāh builds for them the like of it in paradise." (Al-Bukhari 2004: 8:65)²⁷

This flexibility in defining what constitutes a mosque as described in the Quran and the Hadith as well as by scholars of Islamic architecture and architects themselves, is understood to be 'Islam's remarkable cultural tradition of flexibility' (Nasser 2005: 66) resulting in mosques embodying different architectural styles. This tradition of flexibility was echoed by the Muslim women's focus group who considered a cultural centre, a mosque or even the green space behind a bench as a place of prayer.

AUTHENTIC AND INAUTHENTIC REPRESENTATIONS

Many Muslim communities recreate mosques from their places of birth, origin or their imagined community. These so called 'architectural attachments' of Muslim groups sometimes reflect an essentialised representation of mosque architecture, heavily imbued with the nostalgic memory of diasporic communities, or representing 'an architecture of homesickness' (Heathcote 2009: 1). The two old Tatar mosques that remain in Poland are embodiments of Islamic fluidity. Constructed at a particular time and place in the 18th and 19th century in Poland they embody a unique architectural form to this day (Dziekan 2011). The wooden Tatar mosques adapted to the local setting while maintaining aspects of common Islamic architecture.

The architectural firm behind the mosque design in Ochota (TVP 2014) has stayed true to their own architectural style in designing the mosque building. Incorporating elements such as steel and glass, the mosque construction is similar to many other modern shiny structures with rounded corners. As the architectural bureau argued in the Polish media, the mosque investor guided them through the design so as to fulfil all requirements for the mosque. The Polish architectural firm then combined elements of the Islamic and Polish traditions, purposefully intending to reflect a

²⁷ Sahih al-Bukhari is the main hadith collection of Sunni Islam

certain hybridity between the Middle East and Poland. As one architect told a national television station, there was negotiation of how 'Polish' the mosque could be:

We used some elements from Middle Eastern architecture, such as the arches... but all of this was processed and we aimed to, and this was our approach, we aimed for this building to have our modern and let's say European character, or even for a moment we thought a Polish character. We thought of a minaret, we called it a triangular minaret, but unfortunately we did not manage to smuggle this past the investor (laughs)... but instead we have a beautiful 18 metre high minaret, in accordance with what was allowed by the local authorities (TVP 2014)

Despite liturgical fluidity, many mosques incorporate certain features that mark a building out as a Muslim space of prayer; such as a minaret and a dome. Despite the absence of any liturgical requirements for mosque architecture, the sight of a dome and a minaret are common features of mosque building (Saleem 2012). While Saleem focused on British mosques in particular, these trends are also visible in the Polish context. The Ochota mosque resembled a modern building architecturally similar to the numerous new constructions across Warsaw. When the image of the mosque construction plan was presented to some of the participants, they expressed a certain disappointment. The responses from the local residents pointed to a potentially problematic aspect of the hybridity, exposing orientalist attitudes of how a mosque was imagined.

One of the focus groups, conducted with students in the Ochota neighbourhood, all living in close proximity to the mosque construction site, were presented with two images. The first of the images was of the mosque currently under construction in the neighbourhood by the Arab migrant group, the Muslim League. The second image was of a previous mosque building project for a pre-war Tatar mosque that in the end was abandoned due to the outbreak of World War II. The two projects differed on a few key points. The Tatar mosque design resembled Ottoman architecture, was much bigger in size and crucially, had more and higher minarets. The contemporary mosque project was much smaller, with one minaret stretching 18 metres into the skyline. By showing them the images towards the end of the focus group I wanted to record the group's reflections towards the mosque architectures when looking at concrete visual examples of the Ochota mosque architecture and comparing it to a mosque that was going to be built in the area 70

years earlier. Prior to seeing the pictures the group had to rely on their imagination when picturing the design of the new mosque. I felt it was important to engage the groups with geographies of the gaze in order to highlight the power of their gaze and to allow them to reflect on the narratives that such visual geographies encourage (Rose 1993). This is the dialogue that followed when the group were presented the photos of the two mosque projects:

Kasia: And if you look at these two images of the old project for a Tatar mosque and the new Ochota mosque project, what do you think?

Sasha: This one looks more like a church in its architecture (pointing at Ochota mosque project)

Kasia: The one that is about to be built, yes?

Sasha: Yes

Marela: Mh-hm

Sasha: And this one (points to the Tatar project) is more classical, it is more...

Sasha: Then I understand why this project [of the new mosque] went through! (laughs) Because in its shape it is...

Krysia: I think this one is more (pointing to new mosque construction)

Sasha: Yes, yes, a little bit of a forgery! (laughs)

Krysia: I think it is a safe project.

Kasia: A safe one? Do you guys think this was the intention?

Sasha: I think so, yes.

Anton: I think that if they want a mosque then it has to be a classic look, so the first version is better but certainly this (old project) is what caused a certain reaction and this (new project) is a sort of compromise.

Sasha: To adjust to the realities...

Anton: A modern one...

Krysia: You can't see this one from the streets at all!

Kasia: You will see it more when it is built, with the minaret...

Sandra: But also looking at the image on the right, if you would place a cross there then I would think it was a church.

Sasha: Exactly! (laughs)

(Focus group, Ochota locals)

This long extract reveals a few interesting insights into the ideas about mosque architecture presented by a few of its future neighbours. When presented with the photo of the new Ochota mosque project, the focus group participants expressed bewilderment. The mosque did not match their expectation of what a mosque 'should' look like. As such, it did not represent the essentialised architecture they were expecting (Nasser 2005). Interestingly, many participants commented on the resemblance of the construction to a shopping mall or a church. The images of the old Tatar mosque, on the other hand, satisfied an orientalised imagination of a mosque (McLoughlin 2005). Indeed, the participants' narratives evidenced an exotification of the mosque projects by referring to the old Tatar mosque as more 'authentic' than the Ochota mosque that to them seemed 'forged'. Such statements not only marked a static understanding of what a mosque is by the focus group participants, but also reflected a certain 'colonial ideology of difference' (Avcioglu 2007: 99).

Arguing that the new Ochota mosque construction is a 'safe project' the group undermined the Islamic fluidity of the design, not allowing the mosque to be anything but an orientalised construction. As such the group altered the intention of the building from being a mosque to, more familiar sites such as a church or a shopping mall, indicating a difficulty to wholly embrace the more fluid conceptions of what constitutes a mosque. Moreover, the group took ownership of the mosque narrative, suggesting for example that a cross could be put on it, contributing to a dominant production of knowledge of what a mosque is and what it is not. Consequently, participants ideas around the mosque architecture in Warsaw reveals an Orientalism where Islam is presented as frozen in time and place, 'eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself' (Said 1979: 15).

To summarise, this section looked into a fundamental tension in the Ochota mosque construction around the formal definition of what a mosque is. Confusion, irritation and anxiety grew with the lack of clarity regarding whether the construction was a mosque or a cultural centre. However as I have shown, at a minimum, a mosque can be constituted by even a line in the desert. While it was insignificant to the Muslim women that I spoke to whether the new building will be called a mosque or a cultural centre with a prayer space, the distinction mattered to the local residents and the councillor who interpreted this fluidity as deception and dishonesty. Countering

these narratives were the Muslim women's readings of the new mosque constructions as a space to pray, which reflected definitions of a mosque in the Quran and the Hadith. Such a reading potentially facilitates a more contextually rooted analysis of the tensions around mosque constructions. Furthermore, it also counters the accusations of deceptions levelled at the project in Ochota. And lastly, it enriches literature on geographies of mosque conflicts that have so far ignored Islamic sources in mosque conflict debates.

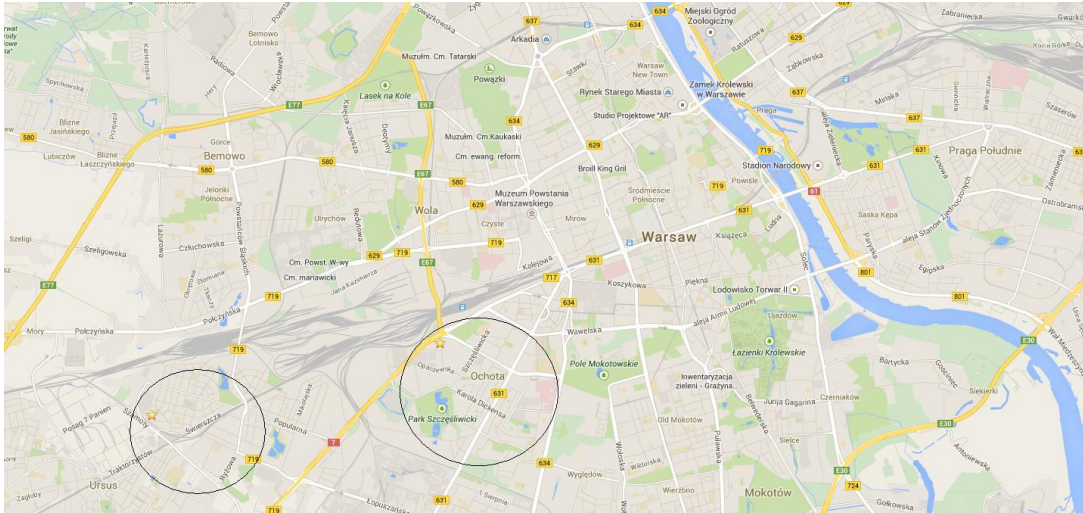
'WHERE WILL ALL THIS TAKE PLACE?'

This section of the chapter moves to the Włochy neighbourhood where the opposition towards the Ahmadiyya mosque construction differed, engaging the locals and focusing on the material presence of the mosque. With that it reflected troublesome entanglements of architecture, sonic disturbance and nostalgia.

A mosque would disturb the architecture. I am mainly concerned with that... It is a residential architecture, a lot of greenery and obviously the mosque would change that because there is a plan for an 18 metre minaret... And so we formulated a statement outlining the arguments of the local government so first and foremost [we argued] about the low architecture, the plan to build on the green plot... There was also an argument that it is a small street, that there are no parking spaces, that they will block.

(Local councillor, Włochy neighbourhood)

In many European cities where Muslim minorities are significantly larger in size, mosques are often located in areas where these minorities themselves reside (Naylor & Ryan 2002). In the case of the mosques in Warsaw, due to the small Muslim population in the city, the Włochy and Ochota mosque sites are located in non-Muslim majority residential areas. The two districts where mosque constructions were planned are located only seven kilometres apart and neighbour each other. While the areas of Ochota and Włochy are geographically very close to each other, the sites selected for the mosque construction in these two areas are quite different.



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FIGURE B - 4.1 MAP OF WARSAW. MAP DATA

Black circle to the left indicating is the Włochy neighbourhood (the star within the circle is the mosque construction site. Black circle on the right is Ochota and the star is the mosque site.

The Ochota site is located far from the residential centre of the neighbourhood, close to a big road and a roundabout. It is home to a Vietnamese immigrant community and is a neighbourhood with a recent growth of gated housing (Piekut 2012). The Włochy neighbourhood on the other hand is much quieter, with local residents taking great pride in its unique architectural Garden City inspired style. Summarising the opposition to the material impact of the mosque on the neighbourhood, the local councillor in Włochy talked about the architectural specificity of the place that was seen as important to the local residents in who mobilised in protest against the mosque. In the letter of opposition signed by 500 local residents these spatial aspects were interwoven with cultural and security concerns:

‘Our concerns give rise to the following issues: The planned mosque, due to its size, would not fit well into the low-built residential neighbourhood... lack of parking spaces and many vehicles on the street [street name removed] would cause it to lose its character as a leisure space with old trees... the mosque construction can lower house prices... We also point to the *fact* that Islam, irrespectively of the religious differences between us, is *culturally distinct and different*, which can lead to unwanted and hitherto unknown social problems in the locality’

(Włochy protest letter, 2011, *own emphasis, own translation*)

The Włochy opposition with its focus on the NIMBYesque sentiments of the erosion of the character of the locality and its greenery reflected familiar arguments

against mosque constructions across Europe (Allevi 2009) and beyond (K. Dunn 2001). Arguments regarding lack of space and lack of parking spaces were articulated as primary reasons in the complaint to the council (Szymanik 2010):

The urban planning here is very specific; the neighbourhood is called Residence Włochy, so just the Residence speaks for itself, right? Garden City Movement and Residential Włochy, it should be a typically residential area.

(Sylwia , paired interview, Włochy neighbourhood)

Mosques were understood to be dissidents from a set of accepted aesthetic geographies of Warsaw and as such, the sites of mosque construction were not allowed to become Muslim spaces:

Will they come with cars or how, I don't know what transport they use. There is no parking spaces allocated, there is no... Where should all this take place? The area around there is such that you can't even built there unless they would do it on their own plot and if they would then either there will be no space for the mosque or they will be able to make space for two, three cars and no more... Well there is the street but if they would park there they would block a whole lane.

(Krystyna, paired interview, Włochy neighbourhood)

In her argument about lack of parking spaces on the street Krystyna echoed a familiar argument of lack of parking spaces for mosque goers (see Goodstein 2010; Naylor and Ryan 2002). She constructed a binary between us who use cars and them who use something else. Her confusion regarding 'what transport they use' emphasised a deeply seated perception of Muslim people's Otherness and further alienation from the local neighbourhood by suggesting that the Muslim group might not use the same transport as her and her local community. The quote begs a further analysis of the 'alienness' of the group building the mosque as foreign and as different (Gale and Naylor 2002).

Presenting Muslims in essential and static ways is reminiscent of Mahmood Mamdani's 'Culture Talk' where he argues that Islam and Muslims are treated as if their culture has not changed since the time of its alleged origin (Mamdani 2004: 18). This is reminiscent of some of the frequent representations of Muslims with 'means of transport' (such as camels) in orientalised quests to portray Muslim people as anti-modern (Gottschalk and Greenberg 2008). The Othering was also

evident in the ways that the Włochy mosque construction grew to become a monster that would keep the locals awake at night in fear (see Puar and Rai 2002).

SONIC GEOGRAPHIES: THE SILENT AZAN AND CHURCH BELLS

The fear comes from this construction, people do not know how it looks, they only hear 18 metre tall minaret and so they are afraid there will be people coming here from all over Warsaw.

(Local councillor, Włochy)

To non-Muslim participants, signs of loss of symbolic ownership of their neighbourhood were materialised through the minaret and the azan (the Islamic call for prayer). The 18 metre high minarets in the Ochota and Włochy neighbourhoods together with the ever-present possibility of a public call to prayer caused anxiety and anger among many participants, even to those initially positive towards the construction of a Muslim place of worship. The symbol of the minaret mobilised a narrative of fear among the local residents. Part of the anxiety was linked to not knowing whether the mosque would in fact broadcast the call to prayer from its minaret:

People are actually scared that there is this minaret created and people do not know... I doubt that there will be someone who calls out to prayer four times a day but people are really scared of it.

(Local councillor, Włochy)

In the past decade there has been a growth in Muslim demands for broadcasting of the azan in Western European countries such as the UK, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Norway. As a response to these trends there has been an escalation of research within the area (Allievi 2009; Gale 2005; Nussbaum 2012; Tamimi Arab 2013b). Contrary to some of the Western European countries, there are no known demands among Muslims in Poland for broadcasting of the azan in public from any of the existing or planned mosques. And yet, the minaret and the azan have become central features in tensions around the urban planning processes that accompany negotiations around mosque constructions in Warsaw, mirroring findings in Western European cities (Gale 2004; Cesari 2005). The established Warsaw mosque in Wilanow, for example, broadcasts the azan only within the material space of the converted house that is used for prayer. As such, the azan becomes a symbolic sound, one that no one who is not inside the mosque can hear (Tamimi Arab 2013a). Yet in my case study of the two mosques, sound becomes a core part of the site and

key to framing opposition against something less tangible (Smith 1997, Dewsbury 2003). As Gallagher and Prior argue, sound has the potential to ‘invite dynamic engagements with the landscape’ (Gallagher and Prior 2013: 278). And the silent azan certainly did, symbolising the deviant character of the mosque. Some participants repeated the arguments commonly used in other countries, focussing on the sound that they imagined would be broadcast across their neighbourhood and beyond; affecting not only the city of Warsaw but the imagination of what was core to Poland. Even when imagined, the azan made tangible an opposition that was not readily expressed. It mobilised reactions that unveiled some of the core oppositions to the mosque, Muslims and Islam. These narratives were smuggled through the mobilisation of sonic geographies (see Dunn 2000). Work on sonic geographies has focussed on the link between sound and place in the formation of identities and communities (S. J. Smith 1997). In the last decade it has looked into everyday perceptions of sound (Bull 2000), performance (Wood, Duffy, and Smith 2007) as well as emotions (Wood 2002). Perhaps most significantly for this thesis is the work on the role and the influence of sound in the construction of places and spaces and in the production of difference (S. J. Smith 1997; Ben Anderson, Morton, and Revill 2005).

In contrast to some Muslim groups in Western European countries, none of the Muslim participants that I spoke to expressed a wish to broadcast the azan (Gale 2004). One of the Muslim participants, Jarek, was surprised at my question regarding the azan being broadcast and did not see the point of it with the current number of Muslims living in Warsaw, thereby providing a sobering reminder of the unrealistic fears of some of the locals. This became particularly poignant when another participant, Marek, laughed my question off:

Kasia: Since we are hearing the church bells and since we have got minority groups here, are you of the opinion that we should also be hearing the azan?

Marek: Well of course! (laughs) No, no, I do not think that is a significant matter...

Kasia: No? We are in a country where there are different religions...

Marek: So like everyone should mark their territory? I don't... no... no.

(Marek, individual interview)

To the non-Muslim participants, however, the minaret and the azan functioned as a territorial marker. To Krystyna and Sylwia, the distinctive mosque features symbolised a move away from a sense of the local neighbourhood. In their narratives, the azan was as much a symbolic takeover as a material takeover of space. Through my fieldwork and particularly in conversation with Sylwia and Krystyna, it became evident that it mattered less whether or not the call for prayer would actually be broadcast. The construction of the mosque with its minaret was already marked as deviant and consequently out of place (Cresswell 1996; K. Dunn 2001). Even if imagined, the minaret and the azan played the role of legitimising a narrative of fear regarding Muslim Otherness and symbolised an out of place-ness of the mosque and consequently, of Muslims in the neighbourhood. To achieve such distance, Muslims as a group were divorced from the long history of positive relations with Islam in Poland and the close proximity of Muslims already living in the neighbourhood. Instead, their Otherness was emphasised:

Krystyna: It [the mosque] is supposed to be with the minaret as well. And a minaret has a minimum of 15 metres because these are the building requirements of theirs and there comes this mua... (refers to muezzin).

Kasia: And is this supposed to be aired out, this call for prayer?

Krystyna: Well five times a day, this is according to their religion. And these are not fixed times, fixed hours because they count the time depending on the movement of the sun so...

Kasia: But this is not supposed to be out loud, right?

Krystyna: Well quite loud, from what I.. I went on the internet and listened to these calls.

Sylwia: This is a quiet neighbourhood so even if you put the radio on louder you can hear everything, so everything will be heard.

(Krystyna and Sylwia , paired interview, Włochy neighbourhood)

The internet allowed Krystyna to engage with the sonic experience of the azan which brought her closer to a hybridised form of the azan removed from her local context, where the broadcasting of the azan was never anticipated (see Gallagher and Prior 2013). Despite the Muslim Ahmadiyya association being present in their local area for many years, Krystyna and Sylwia sought knowledge of the azan from the internet, as such marking their distance to Islam.

Distancing Islam from the perception of the local community was also evident in the neighbouring Ochota. Below is an extract from a focus group with Polish and Belarussian students who lived only a few hundred metres from the planned Ochota mosque construction:

Kasia: Would you be bothered by a call to prayer?

Marela: I would be bothered by it.

Kasia: More than with church bells?

Marela: More.

Kasia: And why?

Marela: Because it would be... the church bells are something completely different, it is like music. However the muezzin is... it is also a bit like music but, I don't know, I feel this way.

Sasha: I would also be bothered by it. Because... the church bells do not bother me. But what I mean is that... to be situated in the world or how should I say it... I am in Warsaw and somehow I want to see churches and hear church bells and it is nice to see people on the Sundays. And if I want to see and dive into another culture, then I will go to Turkey. But for now when I am here, I want to live in this culture and not hear church bells from one side and the Muslim call for prayer from the other side. That is how I see it. And I am not a proponent of not mixing cultures, but if I go to France I would like to hear French, see the Eiffel tower and see people stand with croissants, you know? When I come to Poland I want to eat a doughnut and see churches. So to me it is natural that in another country there would be something foreign, but also something indigenous and that this indigenous thing would dominate.

Marela: I also agree with that.

(Focus group, Ochota neighbourhood)

To the group, and particularly to Sasha, the mosque next door clashed with an essentialised idea of Poland. Sasha, an international student from Belarus and Marela from Bulgaria, both studied at Warsaw University. The sound of the azan permeating the Warsaw neighbourhoods potentially altered the meaning of the place for both Sasha and Marela. Particularly, as stated by Sasha it stripped her experience of what she identifies as Polish; church bells and doughnuts. The meaning of what Warsaw was to the local residents and the international students that temporarily made Warsaw their home depended on certain things associated with the place, such as the sound of church bells. According to Sasha, the azan belonged in a place like

Turkey and not Poland. As such, the sound of the azan is positioned outside of the boundaries of Polishness (see Smith 1997). Despite a long history of the presence of Islam in Poland, the azan was constituted as a foreign imposition or in some more favourable accounts, as an exotic element of the public space. The narratives around the mosque often narrowed down to the need for boundaries which in turn reflected broader issues of ownership of public space. The focus group with Wiktor and other young local Ochota residents suggested ambivalence with regards to the azan and evidenced some negotiation that took place for them as individuals and as a group:

Wiktor: I think that would be really positive, right, because a mosque... their songs... it is really impressive how they can pray... that is difficult to find and it is nice.

Kasia: And what about these songs... the so called azan, meaning call for prayer...

Pola: Right, because that is loud...

Patrycja: We won't be able to sleep.

Kasia: It actually won't be heard apart from inside of the mosque, you won't hear it.

Wiktor: It won't be? Ok, but it is amazing, is it not?

Kasia: But if that would happen here, call for prayers at 5am... how would you feel about that?

Wiktor: Then maybe not (laughs)

(Locals, Ochota neighbourhood)

Initially Wiktor expressed a positive attitude towards the azan, referring to the prayers as 'nice songs'. Yet as soon as the azan would have an impact on him personally and be a part of the sonic landscape of his neighbourhood, he changed his narrative. As the conversation within the focus group developed, Wiktor expressed increasing hostility towards the idea of the azan:

Pola: I am of the opinion that it would be really tiring at first, because one would wake up, but despite that I think the human body adapts to such things...

Wiktor: That is for sure, but it is a good question... because imagine, someone would be shouting at you in a foreign language... oh I am not sure I would stand that.

Olek: There are certain limits...

Pola: I lived in a house in Bialystok that is very close to the rail tracks... and I never ever woke up because of it...

Olek: But Pola, forget about it being loud, we are not talking about that, the cars are louder than that... we are talking about someone calling for prayer to mosque in a foreign language, it is not about noise, please...

(Locals, Ochota neighbourhood)

In the quote above, the ‘nice songs’ transformed into ‘shouting’. Olek was frustrated by Pola’s insistence on the noise and unveiled what he found to be the true issue; imposition of something foreign. What seemed central as the conversation progressed was the insistence on the azan’s foreignness.

Smith (1997) argues that historically, music was used to emphasise secular resistance particularly against theological conservatism. Even though the azan cannot simply be referred to as music (Bham 2014), the ways that participants connected and then disconnected it from music and ‘nice songs’, transforming it into ‘shouting’ can certainly be understood as part of the making and unmaking of neighbourhood social relations in Ochota and Włochy. In a Catholic country where a large proportion of the population practise the religion, the wide acceptance of church bells, including amongst the Polish Muslims, was not surprising. Yet in more secular countries such as the Netherlands and among atheist and secular groups a similar trend has been noted (Tamimi Arab 2013a; Gale 2004).

Even though the main group protesting against the mosque in Ochota, the Europe of the Future, were not concerned with the spatial planning of the mosque, their webpage consisted of hostile commentaries regarding the azan posted by members of the site, including by mosque opponents outside of Poland. One example posted on the Polish anti-mosque webpage spoke of Muslim demands for the loud broadcasting of the azan in the multicultural Botkyrka area of Stockholm:

We can be certain that this was planned. If the ‘call for prayer’ – which in fact is a declaration of barbarian ideologies power over a region – will be accepted in Botkyrka, you can be certain that soon it will also come to a mosque near you “Hedegaard” (Europe of the Future web page)

Anti-mosque protestors used the fear of the locals around the call for prayer to vent their anti-Muslim attitudes. Following Aristotle, Martha Nussbaum (2012) explains fear as a ‘perceived lack of control’. Furthermore, fear is legitimised if it is commonly perceived that Muslims have bad intentions. Martha Nussbaum (2012)

writes of fear as an emotion that is exploited for the purpose of stirring up aggression towards a disliked group, such as Muslims. In the above Islamophobic narrative the azan functioned on two levels through a ‘double meaning’ (S. J. Smith 1997) having an apparent meaning as the call for prayer and a concealed meaning functioning as an undercover declaration of dominance, as was argued above by Hedegaard on the anti-mosque internet forum.

Smith argues that sound can also function as a resistance, transforming racialised oppression (1997). Further arguing that sound ‘can nurture a sense of incorporation within a spatial and a political boundary’, Smith (1997: 510) sees hopeful potential in sonic geographies, encouraging participation across racialised boundaries. However, sound can also emphasise political and racialised boundaries as my case study suggests. The racialisation of the Warsaw neighbourhoods materialised precisely through the symbolic sound of the azan.

In sum, the azan was regarded as a disturbance that had a negative and disruptive impact on the desired image of the neighbourhoods. Partly, the azan disturbed a national imaginary where church bells dominated the landscape. This was particularly bothersome for the international students, Sasha and Marela. To them, a possibility of broadcasting the azan would ruin their idea of what Poland was; a country of church bells and doughnuts. Such an unchallenged presence of church bells fed into the deeply rooted acceptance of the Christian call for prayer in the Warsaw public sphere, emphasising that the religious landscape of the neighbourhoods did not have space for the azan.

FIRST AN AIRPORT, THEN A MOSQUE

Not all opposition to the mosque was rooted in Islamophobia, even though the resistance eventually was expressed in Islamophobic narratives. Disguised in concerns about parking spaces, tall buildings and trees were complex power relations within and between neighbourhoods (see Dunn 2000) evidencing a sense of exclusion of the Włochy neighbourhood from the larger geographies of Warsaw:

It also surprises me and I wonder why do they need such a big space?
This is what puzzles me.

Kasia: And how many square metres is this project?

I don’t know but we can check that here in the council if you want.

(Local councillor, Włochy neighbourhood)

Despite the fact that the councillor did not know himself how big the proposed mosque would be it was nevertheless deemed by him to be too big. After the interview conducted with the councillor, he drove me to the site of the proposed mosque. It was a small plot with a residential house where the Muslim group already had their offices that they used as prayer space. This was the same plot on which the new mosque construction was planned. What struck me when standing outside of the residential home was not only how small it was, but also that there were tall buildings surrounding it. Below is an extract from a participant observation conducted at the site of the future mosque construction that the councillor drove me to:

Behind the potential mosque a new shiny development was being built, we stopped in front of it. I asked the councillor if there was no objection to this other building site (that looked as new apartments or offices) amidst the old architecture of the Garden City Movement. There was, he said, however this one was not that tall. 'It is at least three stories high is it not?' I asked. 'Yes'. I was confused; this building right behind the mosque surely will stick out as much as the mosque, or more. If the issue really is the protection of a low-rise architecture then this new complex does not fit into the historic area of Włochy. The mosque neighbours two houses, one on each side of it. In front of the mosque is a small green plot of land with a couple of swings for children to play and behind it, the new building development and rail tracks, undoubtedly contributing some noise in the immediate area. When we were back in the car I said without expecting a reply that the architecture argument was probably the only way to argue against a mosque. 'Yes', he said without elaborating.

(Participant observation, Włochy neighbourhood, May 2012)

West of the mosque construction planned in Włochy was a plot that resembles a construction site where a new apartment complex called 'Zielona Italia' meaning 'Green Italy' was being built. The apartments were designed to be modern and several stories high with a tall clock tower in the middle. The clock tower will be positioned less than 500 metres away from where the mosque with its 18 metre minaret was going to be constructed. As such, the clock tower and the minaret were not considered equally 'out of place'. This suggested an acceptance of certain constructions that were more 'in-place' and a rejection of others, like the mosque, that was categorically 'out-of-place' (see Cresswell 1995). My participant observation after the interview brought to the fore two key aspects of the Włochy

mosque opposition. Firstly, emphasising ways that the mosque does not fit into the local, Garden City, architecture, was a lesson learnt from the Ochota case where opposition around safety did not grant a refusal to construct the mosque. The second realisation from my participant observation was that the Włochy neighbourhood as imagined by the councillor and by Sylwia and Krystyna, holds on to its character with no more than a few broken bricks. The opposition was therefore a way to restore something that was long gone amidst new developments in the neighbourhood. In sum, the physicality of the mosque, however imagined, afforded the participants an opportunity to express views that they might not have felt comfortable expressing towards Muslims or Islam directly. The mosque as a material space enabled the participants to vent their opposition against the mosque as a symbolic space.

During large sections of our interview, Sylwia and Krystyna diverted the conversation from the mosque to the airport, the dog shelter and garbage collection in the area. As became clear, the links they made between very different considerations unveiled deeper issues in the area, issues around a sense of a loss of power that translated to mistrust of any new impositions in their public space:

Sylwia: The Włochy neighbourhood has become a dump.

Kasia: In what way?

Krystyna: Yes because all the worst things...

Sylwia: ...have come here to us...

Krystyna: ... they are put in the Włochy neighbourhood.

Kasia: Really, like what?

Krystyna: Some sort of waste sorting in the Włochy neighbourhood.

Sylwia: Trash...

Krystyna: All of these malls here in Włochy neighbourhood. In Włochy... there is no infrastructure... If Ms Gronkiewicz-Waltz [President of Warsaw] cares so much about Warsaw then she should distribute more fairly across different neighbourhoods and not that all that is worst is pushed here into Włochy. And then Wilanow is the most expensive neighbourhood in Warsaw together with Mokotow.

Kasia: And why would it all be put in Włochy?

Krystyna: Well, I don't know! I am...

Sylwia: It is calm here...

Krystyna: This is what was decided. That these [areas, Wilanow and Mokotow] will become the representative neighbourhoods [of Warsaw] and here, we will have a garbage and industrial neighbourhood. We got the airport... we got an animal shelter and the airport makes such a noise... everything is brought on the Włochy neighbourhood! There are trucks, I live close to [street name] and the trucks, I tell you, you can't hear your own thoughts inside your apartment. And you got concrete in your apartment because they constantly pour concrete out with the cement truck. Despite the fact that it is a historic street, despite the fact that there is a ban on trucks... they are driving there anyway. Why do they not allow a mosque to be built in Wilanow [neighbourhood of Warsaw] instead?

(Krystyna and Sylwia, Włochy locals, paired interview)

The opposition to the mosque, although important in its own right, was also an opposition to the continuing changes to the Włochy neighbourhood more generally, at times painfully observed by its local residents. The concerns were about local issues that had to do with nostalgia, attachment and a need to preserve the imagined community despite ongoing social changes. Tomas Schmitt identifies the similarities between the tensions around mosques in local neighbourhoods and other space-related conflicts devoted to, for example, commercial enterprises opposed by petitions, demonstrations and public meetings (Schmitt 2012).

When there was no space for the articulation of the loss of their neighbourhood that Krystyna and Sylwia felt, their fears were translated into antagonisms that transformed into Islamophobia. This was evidenced in the outcome in Włochy. In spring 2013 the locals managed to get the council to agree to their demands, rejecting plans for the Ahmadiyya mosque in Włochy. While the Włochy residents did indeed react negatively to other invasions into their public space, such as the airport or the animal shelter, their narratives suggested that the mosque battle was a battle that they believed they could win. And they did. An extract of the letter motivating the decision to reject the mosque construction project read:

The local residents in Włochy are simply concerned about maintaining the calm and the character of the area. The construction of a culturally foreign object is a reason for concern regarding the loss of value on the estates in Włochy. (Rejection Letter. Włochy council, April 2013)

The changing nature of a place like Włochy was traumatic for the local residents who have been there their whole life. After one of my interviews I took a walk

around the Włochy area. What I saw during an observation in the neighbourhood where the Ahmadiyya Muslim community wanted to build a mosque did in some ways corroborate the decaying image of a once idyllic neighbourhood. Krystyna and Sylwia conveyed a desire to make Włochy static, as the changes that the neighbourhood had recently undergone were damaging to it:

While walking around the neighbourhood, looking at buildings with bullet holes in them and broken pavements there was a sense that Włochy was left untouched for many years. What was once a beautiful neighbourhood, even now retains some of its character, with small rounded streets, big green trees, and old buildings with high ceilings, once no doubt magnificent. Local green grocers instead of big supermarkets and people strolling around the streets slowly, is this place only a 10 minute train journey from Warsaw? Once I turned a corner this nostalgic impression was interrupted, however, by cranes and one building site after another. I am not sure what is being built but the noise surely is disturbing the quietness of the place. (Observation, Włochy neighbourhood, May 2012)

The mosque project functioned as a tipping point in a series of recent invasions of public spaces in the Włochy neighbourhood. In order to try and claim back some of the spaces that had been appropriated by unwanted constructions, even if only symbolically, the Włochy residents went against the mosque construction. Cresswell states that what is constituted as marginal is also what helps to define the normal (Cresswell 1996). In the case of the Włochy neighbourhood, construction and opposition of the Muslim Other was an attempt to restore normality in the materially and symbolically littered area. The construction of the Muslim community as ‘out of place’ was a way of claiming back the lost neighbourhood. Class conflict is identified by the early scholars working on NIMBY as key in the creation of exclusionary spaces (DeVerteuil 2013). The act of excluding a mosque from the Włochy neighbourhood has to therefore be understood through the prism of Włochy’s marginalised position in the wider context of Warsaw. Allevi (2009) argues that:

‘mosques – like any form of construction that is proposed in an area where previously it was not present – constitute a form of symbolic ownership of the land. At the same time, resistance to them becomes a very concrete and material sign of dominance and power over the territory. It is clear, therefore, that the conflict surrounding mosques is, above all, a genuine conflict of power’ (Allevi 2009: 38).

CONCLUSION

Research on mosques is typically concerned with Western Europe where a growing influx of Muslim immigrants and their associated claims to their new homes have been observed (Landman and Wessels 2005; Gale 2005; K. Dunn 2001; Jonker 2005; Cesari 2005). The key issues prominent in the two mosque conflicts in Warsaw's Ochota and Włochy neighbourhoods resembled tensions in other European countries such as the UK, Netherlands, Germany and Italy. This chapter has shown that the mosques in Poland were resisted as material and symbolic spaces. The local residents echoed familiar tensions around parking spaces and the call to prayer as proxies for their unwillingness to recognise Muslim Others in their public spaces (T. Schmitt 2012). Participants communicated exclusionary visions of whom and what belonged where or, more accurately, whom and what did not belong (Cresswell 1997). These narratives are understood to reflect deeply engrained racism and colonial sentiments appropriated in the Polish narratives. Despite the long standing presence of the Muslim community in Włochy the mosque project proponents in both neighbourhoods were construed as foreigners, imposers and potential terrorists. Set against the historical context of Islam in Poland, the findings suggest that the mosque opposition is a new phenomenon in the country. This evidence of historical discontinuity gives rise to questions of appropriation of Islamophobic narratives by groups in Poland. Such troublesome complicities are investigated further in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5.

STRANGE ALLIES? FEMINISM & ISLAMOPHOBIA

INTRODUCTION

A certain version or deployment of “freedom” can be used as an instrument of bigotry and coercion. This happens most frightfully when women’s sexual freedom or the freedom of expression /.../ is invoked instrumentally to wage cultural assaults on Islam (Butler 2008: 3)

This chapter looks at the deployment of feminist discourses in opposition to mosque conflicts. It explores the deployment of women’s rights discourses by the participants in this study. It analyses these through a civilisational framework, where the portrayal of Muslims and Islam through the prism of sexual politics functions as a key marker of Islam’s difference and Otherness (Phillips 2012) frequently positioned on the other side of a dichotomous relationship with liberal European values (Fekete 2006). I attempt to unpick the entanglements between feminism, civilisational politics and Islamophobia as the discourses are mobilised in Poland. I interrogate narratives that rest comfortably within a liberal discourse of women’s emancipation, and problematise these alliances that underpin the reading of a fundamental conflict between Islam and liberal feminism within a Polish context.

The questions that I ask in this chapter are: How are sexual politics mobilised in discourses on the mosque, Muslims and Islam? What are the local and global histories through which a certain production of knowledge originates? And finally, what alternative analytical tools can be put to work in order to create more nuanced understandings and alliances that oppose hegemony rather than further legitimise it?²⁸

This chapter is broken down into three sections; firstly ‘Subordination of Muslim Women’ which opens with the hijab as the focal point in the appropriation of feminist discourse in anti-Muslim attitudes. Due to the central role of the hijab in this chapter functioning as the basis for Islamophobic narratives, the chapter opens with rooting the idea of the hijab within an Islamic understanding of its complex

²⁸ These questions are inspired by Saba Mahmood’s encouragement to think of alternative analytical tools to ask different sets of questions (Mahmood 2005) as well as Judith Butler’s call to re-think certain key presumed concepts about the way sexual politics, freedom, individual rights are mobilised in hegemonic discourses (Butler 2008b).

meaning. This is followed by mapping the two main ways in which the Muslim women's subordination is narrated; through 'rescue narratives' and through narratives of fear and threat. Then, Muslim resistance to Islamophobic narratives is described in 'Countering the Narratives' and the chapter ends with a section questioning the question mark in its title 'Strange Allies?' discussing whether the alliances between feminism and Islamophobia are in fact strange.

This chapter contributes to literature on sexual politics, racism/Islamophobia and construction of imagined national/European communities. The literatures that I draw on focus primarily upon entanglements of sexual politics within LGBTQI discourses (Puar 2007; Butler 2008). In a Central and Eastern European (CEE) context these debates have rarely been pursued and where they have, they have focussed on sexual politics through lesbian and gay mobilisations and on Catholic nationalism (Binnie and Klesse 2012; Kulpa 2012; Kulpa and Mizielinska 2012).

SUBORDINATION OF MUSLIM WOMEN

The vast majority of participants in this case study (mosque opponents, mosque supporters, Catholics and secularists) focussed considerable attention on amorphous concerns about the treatment of women in Islam, revealing an near 'obsession with the plight of Muslim women' (Abu-Lughod 2002: 784). Uniting these narratives was a certainty that Muslim women were treated badly and that the cause of this treatment was rooted in Islam. In this way, concerns around women's rights were used to bolster the spatial objections to the mosque that were discussed in the previous chapter (*A Calling for a Place*).

THE HIJAB

The hijab, the headscarf, the veil, the niqab, the burqa, the 'portable seclusion' or the 'mobile home' (Abu-Lughod 2002) are terms that have been used in different spatial and temporal contexts to signify Muslim women's clothing. I begin by turning to sources within Islam to understand what the hijab is, before moving on to present how it was opposed or embraced by the different participants. It will not be possible to do justice to the historical context of the hijab and its multiple meanings here²⁹ and as such the complexities of the meaning will certainly be simplified here for the sake of brevity. I will draw attention to two examples of the different

²⁹ For a detailed exploration into the different meanings of the hijab see Mernissi (1991).

meanings of the hijab and in so doing I hope to nuance a common understanding that reduces the hijab, often referred to as ‘the veil’, to a piece of cloth imposed on women which as Fatema Mersissi (1991: 95) argues ‘is truly to impoverish this term, not to say to drain it of its meaning’.

The hijab³⁰ is a rare sight in Poland and the niqab or burqa³¹ are rarer still due to the small number of Muslims in the Polish public sphere. This does not correspond, however, to the central presence of ‘the veil’³² in anti- and pro-mosque narratives in Poland. The veil functions as a key trope through which assumptions about the oppression of Muslim women are justified. Saba Mahmood described the mobilisations of ‘the veil’ as ‘a symbol and evidence of the violence Islam inflicted upon women’ (S Mahmood 2005: 195). The Islamic hijab is also often in the narratives reduced to ‘the burqa’. In wider geopolitical conflicts ‘the burqa’ has become a tool used to justify hegemonic invasions (see Puar 2007). Perhaps the most famous example is when Laura Bush legitimised the US invasion in Afghanistan through a rhetoric of oppressed women (and children) in Afghanistan who needed to be saved by "civilized people throughout the world" (Abu-Lughod 2002:784). As Puar (2007:7) emphasises drawing on Spivak ‘the dominant reception of feminist discourses on Muslim women... often leaves un-interrogated a West/Islam binary’.

THE DESCENT OF THE HIJAB

Muslim modest dress is often key to the performance of faith-based identity (Lewis 2010). But, as Saba Mahmood claims, it is not simply a performance of one’s faith to the public, it is for many an important part of the process of being faithful (R. Lewis 2010).

Within Islam, the ‘descent of the hijab’ is understood to have been revealed in the fifth year after Hijrah³³ (AD 627). There is no specific mention in the Quran of covering of the hair or face-veiling yet there are several verses that relate to the concept of the hijab (Nalborczyk 2009), commanding both women and men to dress

³⁰ In this text I will use the word hijab, veil and headscarf interchangeably to mark the different uses of the word and also to retain the quotes in their original form.

³¹ The niqab, burqa and face veil will be used with ambition to try and do justice to the meaning of the term and to retain the quotes in their original form

³² The Polish words used to describe the Islamic hijab is: chusta [headscarf, scarf], burka [burqa], nikab [niqab]. For a closer study of the way the Islamic hijab is mobilised by Polish people, see Gawlewicz (2014).

³³ Hijrah refers to events that marked the beginning of the Muslim calendar

modestly. The Quranic references that specifically speak to women encourage them to:

‘wrap their shawls around their breast lines³⁴ (Quran 24:31) and for the wives of the Prophet and women believers to ‘wrap their garments closely around them, for this makes it more likely that they will be recognised and not be harassed’ (Khalidi: 33:59).

Verse 53 of Sura 33 in the Quran is regarded ‘as the basis for the institution of the hijab’ (Mernissi 1991: 95):

‘O believers! Do not enter the chambers of the Prophet for a meal unless given leave, and do not wait around for it to be well cooked. Rather, if invited enter, and when fed disperse, not lingering for conversation... And if you ask his wives for some favour, do so from behind a screen³⁵; this is more chaste for both your hearts and theirs’ (Khalidi: 33:53)

This Quranic verse regarding the hijab is closely related to the splitting of spaces, between the private space (the household of the Prophet and his wives) and the public space (the mosque as a site of communal gathering and prayer) (Mernissi 1991: 100). The spatial dimension of the hijab refers to a separation of spaces but not necessarily to a gendered separation³⁶. The hijab became common for women across the Muslim world but declined and almost vanished until the Islamic resurgence in the 1970s caused Muslim women across the Arab world and Europe to start wearing the hijab again (Ahmed 2011), giving rise to an Islamic fashion industry (Lewis 2010).

Meanwhile in Central Europe Polish Muslim women, most of who were part of the Tatar community, did not wear the hijab apart from during prayers³⁷ (Nalborczyk 2009). The Arab migration to Poland, that intensified as the result of the improvement in ties between Communist regimes and countries in the Middle East (Gasztold-Señ 2012), influenced the practices of the hijab. Despite the long-established history of Islam’s presence in Poland through the Tatar Muslims, there is

³⁴ Here, there is a difference in the translation. While Tarif Khalidi translates the verse as quoted in the text, Laleh Bakhtiar translates it pointing more directly to the head covering: ‘And let them draw their head covering over their bosoms...’ (22: 31)

³⁵ In other translations, for example Laleh Bakhtiar’s the word symbolising the hijab is instead translated to ‘a partition’.

³⁶ A screen is how a hijab is described here. A more abstract understanding is made by the Muslim Sufis where the hijab has a negative meaning and refers to a separation between a person and God (Mernissi 1991).

³⁷ This was confirmed during my visit to one of the Tatar villages in Eastern Poland, Kruszyniany, where women put on a loosely fitted headscarf reminiscent more of Eastern European scarves worn by women than the Muslim hijab.

little recorded historical material about Muslim women's dress in Poland. My interview with the Imam of the Warsaw mosque suggested that the hijab was a tangible difference that demarcated the Tatars from the Muslim immigrants of Arab descent:

Tatars were used to women entering the mosque without scarves, or even if they had a scarf it was such a little bit (points to a small section on his own head) ... and people here [the Tatars] said this is ok because we are practicing this for so long and the others [Arab migrants] said that this is not ok.

(Imam, individual interview, Warsaw mosque)

Most of the Muslim women I spent time with in Warsaw wore the hijab on a daily basis. Whether or not they wore the headscarf at any particular time was dependent on the spatial context in which we met, with some only wearing a headscarf to the mosque, while others had days when they wore it and days when they did not. Usually, all female participants wore the hijab in the mosque. During the all-women meetings that they often organised the women would often wear their hijab's because they would often film the lectures or meetings they held and upload them on YouTube and Facebook. Among my participants, there were women who had only recently adopted the hijab despite being Muslim for some years, those who did the opposite, and those who selectively wore the hijab; for example they did not wear it to work but would do so when with other Muslims. Such practices evidence fluidity in Muslim women's dress reflecting both the symbolic and the material functions of the hijab (Lewis 2010). Yet despite the heterogeneity in hijab practices this did not translate into a rich and fluid understanding of the hijab among the non-Muslim participants.

For most of the non-Muslim participants, the hijab was often reduced to a singular marker for Muslim women, signifying their religious belonging and crucially for this chapter: their subordination to patriarchy (Ahmed 2011); lack of assimilation (Scott 2007); resistance to Western secularism (Scott 2007); or tendency for radicalism (Moors 2011). The participants mobilised gender equality narratives through two prisms; one echoing 'rescue narratives' (Bracke 2012) and the other echoing narratives of threat (Puar and Rai 2002).

THE WOMAN QUESTION

The question of women was an issue... that was also brought up by the locals... the treatment of women by Muslims. That it is not acceptable, right? The local residents do not like it and they definitely do not support it. They are against what their [Muslims] religion tells them.

(Local councillor, Ochota neighbourhood)

As one of the councillors pointed out when reflecting on the mosque opposition in his neighbourhood the 'women question' was important to many local residents in the Ochota neighbourhood. The following quotes are responses by the participants to my questions regarding what they found to be most problematic with the mosque construction and with Islam in general:

Treatment of women? That a man is a man and therefore a human being and the woman is something worse, her task is to do dishes, clean, certainly not to work, maybe pick up kids, serve, clean up. Dinner has to be cooked for the husband when he comes home... We got gender equality here, right?

(Patrycja, focus group)

Not respecting the opposite sex, precisely speaking women... Because the women don't get anything. I think they are treated worse than animals.

(Krystyna, paired interview)

I critique the stripping of women's rights, often against their will, and this is central.

(Andrzej, individual interview)

By stressing the importance of women's rights, the participants united in an imagined community where gender equality was a norm and further differentiated themselves from the Muslim Other. By arguing firmly against the 'unacceptable' treatment of Muslim women, who were not considered as part of their own imagined community, they alluded to the idea that they themselves belonged to an imagined community that did not accept such treatment of women. Patrycja's question mark at the end of her statement serves as a reminder of the deeply rooted tensions in the Polish society where the narratives of gender equality and feminism are not so much a part of the Polish national identity, as they are in countries such as the Netherlands for example (see Bracke 2012). The narratives of the liberal mosque

opponents 'Europe of the Future' are reminiscent of such suspension narratives (see Puar 2007).

Europe of the Future's main argument against the mosque in Ochota was that the values of the Muslims building the mosque contradicted European liberal values such as secularism, women's rights and freedom of expression:

We critique political Islam, and this is very important, we critique it from the perspective of... the acceptance of liberation movements, women's movements, gay movements, human rights... we would subscribe under this idealism.

(Andrzej, individual interview)

These values voiced from within Poland signify a certain form of suspension of the Polish national setting (see Puar and Rai 2002). In turn, this is suggestive of Polish aspirations to be considered part of Western Europe and with that, confirm a superiority that many Polish participants ascribed to the West as being the avatar of freedom and consequently of gender equality (Butler 2008).

While Andrzej's group claimed to oppose 'political Islam' and 'fundamentalist Islam', Andrzej himself spoke in general terms about Muslims and Islam focusing on women's rights and secular values:

Andrzej: You cannot respect several sets of value systems that contradict each other, right? You cannot be a feminist and at the same time support fundamental Islam, you can't.

Kasia: So are these values contradictory according to you?

Andrzej: Well, aren't they?

(Andrzej, individual interview)

Europe of the Future's narrative draws from feminist discourses that emphasise a liberal 'defence' against Muslim oppression as argued for by Susan Okin (1999) and Uni Wikan (2002). Additionally the group often mobilised narratives of 'native informants' such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali or Irshad Manji. Placing themselves in a European imagined community the group reproduce narratives reminiscent of key tropes found within the Western European discourse:

In our identity we rarely refer to the Enlightenment. In Poland there isn't any (pause) it is very difficult to communicate this because there isn't an organisation, there isn't this discourse present.

(Andrzej, individual interview)

Andrzej, the anti-mosque activist representing Europe of the Future relied heavily on Western European liberal feminist discourse. He provided an interesting perspective regarding discrimination and choice:

Kasia: If Muslim women are prohibited from wearing for example the niqab, is that discrimination?

Andrzej: No, it is not discrimination. It is not discrimination because... and a good answer was provided by the French minister of integration. She said that whenever she hears that it is a right to wear a niqab, she thinks of these women that would have had acid poured over them if they took it off ... I do not support face-veiling... it gives me goose bums... a veiled face that I need to have because I am a woman, I lose my freedoms.

K: And if she wants to wear it?

Andrzej: The question is... if I would know of two or three such stories I would be able to shake my head and say ok... Soon, and this terrifies me, we will start discussing whether being stoned is a right as well. Sorry, I am exaggerating a little...

(Andrzej, individual interview)

The mosque opponent located his opinions regarding the hijab in the fact that he did not know any Muslim women who wore the niqab by choice. Referring to stoning, Andrzej placed the hijab in the category of violence against women. Bans on the veil in other European countries were not understood by him as discrimination. This was partly because he found the hijab to be an oppressive practice and also because he didn't consider Muslim women to be autonomous, independent people who could make informed choices (Bilge 2010). When Andrzej dismissed the agency of the veiled woman he did so through the following rationale:

'Agency involves free-will; no woman freely chooses to wear the veil because it is oppressive to women; thus veiled women have no agency' (Bilge 2010: 18).

Narratives of choice operated strongly in anti-veil discourses and were particularly resonant within the individualist liberal discourse mobilised by Europe of the Future. As Bilge summarises, such an understanding of agency and choice is confined to what is in line with Western secular liberal values (Bilge 2010). These sentiments also resonated with the participants who did not explicitly identify with Europe of the Future. Many saw the hijab as having been forcibly imposed on Muslim women and were unable to conceive of them as having agency over their veiling. In the example below a participant talks of women who wore the hijab as passive:

They can let a woman uncover her face in a normal way. They can let women dress normally...

(Krystyna, paired interview)

Oppression of Muslim women was understood by many participants to be directly linked to and caused by Islam. Muslim men were understood to violate women's rights because of their religion and their culture (Saba Mahmood 2006). It therefore was up to men to 'allow' women to not wear the hijab. As has been noted by Valentine (2010) and Simonsen (2008) majority populations rarely assume that they can change or adapt but rather demand of those identified as out of place to change (Simonsen 2008; Valentine 2010). Following this, participants' narratives often suggested that Muslims needed to prove to them that they were not oppressing women. As Saba Mahmood (Saba Mahmood 2003: 1) argued:

Islam bears the burden of proving its compatibility with liberal ideals, and the line of question is almost never reversed. We do not ask, for example, what would it mean to take the resources of the Islamic tradition and question many of the liberal political categories and principles for the contradictions and problems they embody?

SAVING MUSLIM WOMEN

The conflict mobilised between Islam and the West has become an alleged battle for the 'liberation' of Muslim women (Ahmed 2011). Some participants gained knowledge about Muslims women from books, particularly from popular literature about Muslim women that have become bestsellers in Poland in recent times. This popular literature by women who were Muslim or 'passed' as Muslim is discussed by Maira (2011), Mahmood (2008) and Ahmed (2011) in their work critical of hegemonic narratives on Muslim women. In my study these narratives were

powerful enough to affect people who were initially positive towards Muslim's, such as one of my participants, Celina. Celina worked closely with Muslim refugees in Warsaw and knew a number of people from Muslim countries through her previously having shared student corridors with international students. She was positive towards the new mosque construction as well as Muslims and Islam yet expressed ambivalence towards the position of women in Islam. Her established positive encounters with Muslims through her own experience were thrown into doubt after having read a book authored by Ayaan Hirsi Ali. As a consequence, Celina's narrative was delicately balanced between her positive personal encounters with Muslims and the testimonials of a 'native expert':

I think that Muslims that live here, and perhaps it is very naive and I realise that, but the people I meet are ok people and I am aware that somewhere in Somalia, I don't know, in different countries, these things do happen. And often I imagine, when I meet these people, that maybe they are these girls that escaped like her [Ayaan Hirsi Ali]... I don't, I mean I am sure this circulates in my head somewhere but I haven't directly met such people and I am also trying to not look at these people in that way, like that this is certainly a man that beats his wife and does whatever she [Ayaan Hirsi Ali] went through.

(Celina, focus group, Ochota neighbourhood)

Celina battled with the idea that it was 'naïve' of her to make generalisations about Islam from the people she knew in Poland who were Muslims and whom she had known, worked with and had good relations with. Reading a book by Ayaan Hirsi Ali had made her doubt whether she could in fact generalise her own positive experiences to all Muslims. Instead, she allowed the book to shape her understanding of what was happening 'somewhere in Somalia' or in some other countries where she imagined that Muslim women were oppressed.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali and other women of Muslim background who denounced Islam, quickly rose to fame becoming 'liberated apostates', insider experts, those that hold 'authentic knowledge' about Islam (Bracke 2012:242). These 'moderate Muslim spokespersons' (Maira 2011: 120) provided 'native testimonials' (Mahmood 2008:83) of their 'liberation' in the West. Positioned in a dichotomous relationship with 'oppressed' Muslim women, they further cemented the conviction that Muslim women are in need of saving (Abu-Lughod 2002). When the saving is done by a

‘liberated apostate’ (Bracke 2012: 242) Spivak’s (1988) original observation³⁸ gets a twist that works to add further legitimacy to the rescue narrative; brown women saving brown women from brown men (Bracke 2012). In Poland it was through the liberal concern of white women like Celina that that such views gained traction. Despite the fact that the majority of the Muslim women in Poland were white they were racialised as Muslim due to their wearing of the hijab. As such, their whiteness did not make them intelligible as ‘proper’ white women (Nayak 2006).

Rescue narratives had a considerable impact on the way in which the participants perceived the mosque. Some participants, such as Celina, felt a responsibility towards the women that she feared were oppressed. Because their encounters with women who wore the hijab were rare and with women who wore the niqab or the burqa rarer still, the participants could only construct imaginary encounters with visibly Muslim women. Below are two quotes demonstrating this, one continuing the narrative from Celina who was a mosque supporter and the other from Andrzej, a mosque opponent:

I know that some women choose themselves to wear these burqas and then I think there is nothing wrong with that. But nevertheless if I would see such a woman I think a light would go on in my head that something bad must be going on and perhaps something should be done.

(Celina, pro-mosque)

I cannot say that ok because she is a Muslim than here you go, please go ahead and I won’t interfere.

(Andrzej, individual interview)

Andrzej did ‘interfere’ and as such materialised the rescue narratives through his work with a German organisation:

I have contact with a German organization and here I cannot say too much because it is an organization that helps German Muslim women who wants to leave Islam... it’s not even about Islam, they just want to escape an oppressive culture. So I have a lot of experiences from personal contacts with these women...

Kasia: But who is doing the rescuing, Germans?

³⁸ In her early critique of the rescue narratives Spivak’s sharp critique observed the phenomenon of ‘white men saving brown women from brown men’ (see Spivak 1988).

Germans, Germans, but we help them because in Poland it is easier because of many reasons...

(Andrzej, individual interview)

Both Celina and Andrzej talked about the responsibility to 'do something' about the oppression that they attributed to Muslim women. Celina emphasised her own awareness of Muslim women's agency and their choice to wear 'these burqas' yet nevertheless upon encountering a burqa-clad woman in a public space, mosque supporter Celina admitted that she would be alarmed. This reinforced an imagined geography of a liberated West where women engage in the plight of the oppressed versus the East where Muslim 'women shuffle around silently in burqas' (Abu-Lughod 2002:784). The quote from Andrzej was part of a larger narrative that argued against what he saw as a lack of intervention towards oppressed Muslim women justified by ill-conceived cultural relativism. He critiqued a lack of intervention towards patriarchy within Islam arguing that it pointed to double-standards when patriarchy within other cultures and religions was readily challenged.

Echoing the sentiments in Celina's and Andrzej's narratives, many participants emphasised the central role of culture. Bartosz, a local resident in the Ochota area and opponent to the nearby mosque construction, suggested that the oppression of Muslim women stems 'from the Quran and from their culture'. Yet another participant, Franciszek, provided a good example of the common conflation of the categories Muslim women and Arab women. Despite being more positive towards the mosque construction than Bartosz, Franciszek still saw 'the Arab women as being dominated by... well by the whole religion'. A perception of inherent violence within the religion often acted as a tipping point for participants resulting in a change of heart about the mosque. Being mosque supporters and locating their support primarily in a religious understanding of the need for a place to pray, Catholic participants Franciszek and Adriana were swayed by the narratives of Muslim women's oppression:

Why can people who are able to kill their sister because their religion urges them to, live next to us? If they want to kill each other then let them do it in their own country...

(Franciszek, paired interview, Ochota neighbourhood)

I found out from Maria for example... about murders and so on based on religion and it is obvious that there is some reaction from European citizens.

(Adriana, paired interview, Ochota neighbourhood)

Both statements emphasise an imagined civilisational gap between ‘us Europeans’ who do not kill our sisters and ‘them Muslims’ who do and trace this behaviour to the rules inherent in ‘their religion’. Such a binary understanding reflects tensions between Western liberal values and the values of the non-liberal others (Phillips 2012). The narratives of violence against women so commonly mobilised in the context of Islam and reproduced in the participants’ narratives above can be read as problematic in several ways. First, such statements suggest that religion and in particular Islam has some sort of a monopoly on violence against women (Woodhead 2008). Secondly, assumptions about the qualities of a ‘liberator’ can be co-opted by groups (and nation states) into justifying their own violence against women or at least in not recognising their violence against women because of their imagined identity as inherently opposed to such violence.

The construction of violence against women such as honour killings or forced marriages within Islamophobic narratives are equated with the imbricated notions of Islamic religion and culture and can easily ignore similar crimes that take place outside of an Islamic context. These crimes are seldom called ‘honour killings’ but instead, as Mahmood (2008)³⁹ notes in the context of the US, referred to as ‘crimes of passion’ or ‘misunderstandings at home’⁴⁰. Maja referred to this increasingly prominent discourse among anti-mosque activists around violence against women in Islam as hypocrisy. Critiquing the anti-mosque group Europe of the Future on the website of the women’s organisation she worked for she wrote:

Those guys, the protectors of women’s rights, want to talk about 12 honour killings in Europe yearly, but not about the 150 Polish women that die in Poland because of misunderstandings at home.

(Maja, individual interview)

³⁹ A few years ago in the US ‘crimes of passion’ were reported to come up to a number of 1500 per year in comparison to ‘honour killings’ in Pakistan where the recorded number was 1000 per year. In the Polish context of domestic violence, Amnesty International reported 110 000 instances of domestic violence in year 2011.

⁴⁰ As part of the second case study in this thesis I interviewed a feminist activist in Poland, Maja. Maja participated in a debate on violence against women with Andrzej, the representative of the Europe of the Future organisation.

The danger in conceptualising violence against women along such lines is that honour killings, forced marriages and domestic violence within Islam are understood to be an integral part of Islam, while crimes of passion, domestic violence and forced marriages happening outside of an Islamic context, especially when taking place in the West, are understood as individual pathology or excessive passion (Mahmood 2008).

This section evidenced how a focus on ‘saving’ Muslim women from Islamic culture and religion was an important ingredient in fuelling anti-mosque attitudes and was legitimised by the writings of ‘native informants’ (see Spivak 1988). When mobilised in Poland, these narratives echoed Western representations of Muslims, drawing on the dichotomies between Western liberties and Islamic culture/religion posed as restrictive. Mobilised in a Polish context, I argue that this gave rise to what Puar (2007:2) terms ‘sexual exceptionalism’.

UNVEILING THREATENING BODIES

Running alongside rescue narratives were narratives of the threat posed by the veiled woman (see Puar 2007). From being victims of the Islamic religion and culture, Muslim women were simultaneously perceived as its threatening embodiment.

In 2010 when Europe of the Future organised an anti-mosque demonstration in Ochota, they announced their protest by dressing Warsaw city centre with posters of a woman in niqab placed next to images of minarets that resembled missiles. The posters were inspired by the almost identical Swiss anti-minaret posters, evidencing an importation of Islamophobic discourses from other European countries by the Polish group. The use of an altered version of the Swiss poster rather than an original Polish image sent a message to Warsaw residents about the organisers’ desire to see the ‘mosque problem’ through Western eyes (Allen 2010). The Polish version of the poster read ‘Stop the radical mosque in Warsaw’. The ‘burqa’ed woman’ as a terrorist body functions primarily as an image of threat and aggression. This was exemplified by Pola, who was supportive of a mosque being built in her neighbourhood and yet ambivalent about the issues of women’s rights within Islam. Pola brought up memories of seeing veiled women when abroad:

A few years ago I spent six weeks in London, as a holiday, and there you can really notice it... there were women that covered from top to bottom in black and they even had some *metal thing attached to their faces*, which was really weird... I felt really strange when walking through Hyde Park. There were sun chairs on the grass arranged in a circle and the women, there were only women there, they sat... it honestly *looked terrifying*, I was... it was a circle, all the women in black, you didn't know what was going on, what they were *really doing*.

(Pola, focus group, Ochota neighbourhood, *own emphasis*)

Pola perceived covered Muslim women as a threat and described feeling scared. The niqab in her narrative was linked to a threat arising from uncertainty about what the women covered in black were 'really doing', echoing the narratives of deception around the mosque explored in the previous chapter. As stated by Moors, face-veiling had a double-meaning. It created discomfort as a symbol of gender subordination and at the same time provoked resistance to established normativities (Moors 2011). Pola's observation of veiled covered Muslim women with 'some metal thing attached to their face' is reminiscent of Puar's and Rai's (2002) discussion on the 'pathologized terroristmonster'. According to Foucault, the idea of monstrosity can be traced back to a broader history of sexuality, where 'the monster' is understood as abnormal and a sexual deviant, thereby regulating proper desires (Foucault 1997 quoted in Puar and Rai 2002).

David Sibley describes complex and entangled emotions such as fear and repulsion but also desire and attraction floating to the surface when people encounter those marked as different. Appearance, particularly dress, becomes important to the ways that people decide who is in and who is out of place (Valentine 2010; Simonsen 2008). As Valentine emphasises, the body becomes a primary marker for setting boundaries between us and them (Valentine 2010). My participants struggled with conflicting emotions upon seeing 'veiled women' provoked by the idea that these women did not belong to the particular space in which they were encountered; on the beach or in a park for example (Sibley 1995). The inability to 'make sense' of veiled women of the Orient and the need for them to be unveiled to be intelligible (see Butler 2011) emerged in the narrative of Olek, a participant who made up part of the same focus group as Pola. Olek, who lived close to the future Ochota mosque, spoke about his travels to Turkey where he encountered Muslim women in Islamic clothing:

When we were in Turkey the women at the seaside were bathing in these things... they did not even take them off when entering the sea. They were lying by the shore completely covered up, Turkish women... I was really frightened, and so were you, right? (turning to his female flatmate who nods)

(Olek, focus group)

Olek describes being scared and feeling threatened, similar emotions to those Pola identified in the previous quote. Yet this time the fear was not explicitly linked to a potential terrorist threat of a group of veiled women gathering. Rather, the fear was located in the Muslim women's presence on the beach with clothes on. It was as such devoid of the visibility of the female body that would satisfy a male gaze (see Alloula 1986). By pointing out the hijab's out of place-ness, participants signalled what they considered to be 'improper' ways for women to dress and act.

The uneasiness caused by not being able to see the veiled women is reminiscent of European colonial encounters with Islamic societies where the colonisers gained knowledge of the Orient through their gaze (Alloula 1986). Veiled women, in contrast, denied access and penetration of this male gaze (Zine 2002). The veiled woman was also often eroticised as is evident in the many colonial accounts of the harem (Scott 2007). The 'veiled' women's nakedness was part of a process of unveiling that stimulated the colonisers' sexual imaginations (Scott 2007).

Alloula's (1986) work on colonial postcards of naked Algerian women illustrates a fixation upon the colonised women's body. In Alloula's example the coloniser's gaze is initially rejected by the covered Algerian women who through their veiling withdrew the possibility for colonial expropriation and resisted the voyeuristic gaze of the photographer (Alloula 1986). When unveiled and eroticised, through paid models impersonating the veiled inaccessible women, the images serve a colonial perception of the native (Alloula 1986). Implicated in this are gendered norms of the male gaze and the female object of the gaze. This exoticisation of Muslim women so prevalent during colonial periods has recently re-emerged (Saba Mahmood 2006).

Contemporary manifestation of these unveiling 'missions' are echoed in the veil bans imposed in Western European countries such as France's niqab ban recently upheld in the European Court of Human Rights (Williams 2014). During one focus

group, participants engaged in a discussion about why Western European countries ban the veil:

Sasha: And the [bans on the] scarves are coming from a.... it comes from terrorism and a fear of terrorist attacks...

Marcela: That underneath these clothes...

(Sasha and Marcela, focus group)

Marcela was interrupted before she had the chance to finish her sentence, but the implication of the short exchange was that the banning of the veil had to do with a threat of terrorism and that the veil and the Muslim women's clothing could potentially be used for terrorist activities.

Following Aristotle, Martha Nussbaum talks of fear as a 'perceived lack of control' she quotes Aristotle saying: 'when we fear other people, he adds, we do so only if we think that they have both sufficient power to harm us and bad intentions so that they are plausibly seen as likely to harm us' (Nussbaum 2012: 30). Yet this Aristotelian explanation does not reflect the experiences of either Pola or Olek, neither of whom expressed fear corresponding to a fear of an attack on them. Rather, it was a fear of the unknown, the unintelligible.

The fear of the racialised Muslim women's bodies can be interpreted in light of Judith Butler's (1993; 2011) and Sara Ahmed's (2002) conceptualisations of fearing black bodies. The veiled women come to be feared by Pola and Olek through sight; the participants' gazes could not make sense of the 'unknowable' bodies (Puar 2007). The 'burq'ed woman' is conceptualised by Puar (2007) as a queer body that is 'unknowable'. But, as Puar points out that difference is not only seen, but also felt. I draw on Puar, (who draws on Ahmed (2002) who in turn draws on Butler (1993) to argue that the veiled women in the park or on the beach were not feared because of any immediate threat that they posed. Instead they were feared because their bodies were unintelligible (Butler 2011), they were bodies that 'passed by' (Ahmed 2004), the fear of them was located in the 'unknown of when, where, how, or if' (Puar 2007:185). Pola and Olek did not know what to fear about the veiled women's bodies and it is precisely this not-knowing that made them fear the veiled bodies (Puar 2007). Puar's analysis helps in understanding the fear the participants

felt beyond deeming fear of Muslims as primitive emotions, as conceptualised by Nussbaum (2012).

RE-ORIENTALISING MUSLIM WOMEN'S BODIES

During a Polish talk show, Muslim women were invited as guests to talk about their lives as Muslims which focussed upon their veiling practices, the issue of forced marriages and questioned the freedom that they had within Islam. Aisha, one of the participants in my study, was one of the guests. The other participants in the focus groups followed the show from their TVs at home. During our focus group, the participants talked at length about Aisha's⁴¹, experience discussing how her clothes were changed prior to the show by the production team:

Aisha: Because I don't look Arab... like an Arab Muslim woman, but I had to be dressed like [one].

Dagmara: Talk about how they dressed you!

Aisha: They [TV show people] wanted me to look more traditional so they made a black cloth.

Kasia: They made a cloth?

Aisha: Yes and they told me to wear it. And luckily I had Dorota there because I would not have said anything... so we fought for me to be able to wear a skirt at least...

Dagmara: Aisha doesn't wear long skirts... and [she doesn't wear] these small shoes...

Nadia: Aisha wears jeans and a hoodie, always...

Dagmara: And the blouse they gave her was kind of Arab, Indian... something like... it was made to look Eastern.

Nadia: Yes as a Muslim coming there with jeans... no, you need to look in a certain way because God forbid if they will think you are like a normal person! (laughs)

Aisha: And they said 'you know we won't film so that your clothes are showing' but that is exactly what they did, when I walked in they filmed from top to bottom!

Dagmara: They wanted to show how a Muslim woman looks...

Lena: Yes how a Muslim woman looks.

(Muslim women, focus group)

⁴¹ Aisha has a Polish and Iraqi background.

Despite her very different life history to the Muslim women that Aisha shared the TV studio with, they were ‘assumed to be a coherent group or category’ (Mohanty 2004: 30). What is evident from the above narrative is a certain production of a Third World Woman⁴² as representative of a monolithic culture, frozen in time, space and history (Mohanty 2004). When Aisha, by wearing jeans and trainers, did not meet the orientalist image expected of her, her dress was altered in order for her body to entertain the imaginary of a singular definition of a Muslim woman for the benefit of the Polish women in the studio. This facilitated the construction of the Muslim woman as a counterpart to the emancipated Polish woman. As a subaltern, Aisha could not speak (Spivak 1988). The TV anchor and the concerned audience acted therefore as spokespeople for the subaltern woman, ‘giving’ her the voice that they so wanted her to have. These narratives established a common ground among the viewers for the Othering of Muslim women (Bracke 2012).

NARRATIVES OF EXCEPTION

The Western feminist liberal discourses that many participants, chiefly among them Andrzej of the Europe of the Future group, entertained requires contextualisation. Poland’s peripheral position in Europe and particularly towards Western Europe exemplifies the complexity of understanding these debates within a Polish context.

Women’s rights are a sensitive issue in Poland. The reality of gender equality in Poland is that, despite women’s elevated image in Polish society as the ‘reproducers of the nation’ (Yuval-Davis 1997), women are disadvantaged with regards to their political, social and economic situation and, as many feminists have argued, Poland is far from a gender equal country. As such, the mobilisation of feminist discourses in Poland speaks to Jasbir Puar’s (2007) discussion of exceptionalism.

In her writing on homonationalism in the United States of America Jasbir Puar talks of the ‘narratives of exception’ (Puar 2007:3-4) at work when the heteronormative imagined community is suspended temporarily and thereby recognises some homosexual subjects. Such tactics are performed in order to unite a national sentiment outlining who is the enemy that ‘we’ as the imagined community are waging war on. Puar (2007) further argues that such exception provides homosexual

⁴² The term ‘third world woman’ was originally used to describe women of African, Caribbean, Asian and Latin American descent and native people of the United States. In the last few decades the term also refers to ‘new immigrants’ such as Arabs (Mohanty 2004:49).

groups with a certain currency that they otherwise lack due to the limited rights afforded to them⁴³.

In contrast to many narratives observed against Islam in Western Europe (Butler 2008; Bracke 2012) even though some elements of homonationalism are at play in the Polish context (see Kulpa 2012), participants in my study generally did not mobilise a gay rights agenda in their anti-Muslim discourses. They instead focussed primarily on gender equality employed as a marker for civilisational difference with Muslims. Women's rights gained currency when rallied by all sides and supported by a wider global context of a 'war on terror' where war for the 'liberation' of women, for example in Afghanistan, was waged by global powers and supported by liberal feminist groups (Puar 2007).

Given its historical entanglement with Communism the appropriation of feminist discourse in Poland is different than in Western Europe. Polish values are often characterised as being 'more traditional' (Jasińska-Kania 2012) and the relationship with feminism contested due to the conservative influence of the Catholic Church in Poland (Valentine, Piekut, and Harris 2014). In analysing how gender and civilisational politics are mobilised in the Polish mosque case study, the Polish data has to be understood as coming from a context where rights, feminism and civilisational politics are not necessarily discourses rooted in the Polish national identity, and, are understood differently due to a legacy of Communism where gender equality was enforced and, eventually, rejected by many Polish women⁴⁴.

There have been numerous heated debates regarding gender equality in Poland, a recent example being the conflict regarding the *Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence* (Council of Europe 2011). Objections were raised against Poland signing the convention due to its 'promotion' of fluid gender roles including homosexuality and its rejection of traditional gender roles in what was termed a feminist Trojan horse (Przeciszewski 2014). Another recent example is the conflict between those on the Catholic right that view feminism as an ideology that is harmful to traditional values and those on the secular liberal left propagating women's rights and other controversial issues

⁴³ Puar takes as an example Israel's LGBTQ-friendly agenda used to facilitate civilisational politics towards Palestine, a so called pink-washing (Puar 2013).

⁴⁴ This will be expanded upon in the second case study.

such as abortion (Graff 2014). While this will be explored more fully in the second part of this thesis (abortion case study), I raise it here in order to point out the exceptionalism of the gender equality claims made by my participants, even those who were not supportive of ‘gender ideology’ or feminism.

COUNTERING THE NARRATIVES

Muslim participants frequently referred to women’s rights within Islam. Responding to allegations posed to them, they did not attempt to assert the compatibility of Islam with a liberal framework (Mahmood 2003). Rather, they used Islam to challenge the narratives of women’s discrimination. In contrast to the non-Muslim participants Muslim participants emphasised women’s rights as inherent to Islam. The local Imam, for example, expressed his surprise at the critique of Islam by the liberal anti-mosque group Europe of the Future:

People said it was a terrorist religion, that it gives no freedom to women. And what was very strange... last year during this demonstration outside the [new] mosque... some women had posters saying ‘freedom to women’. I was really surprised when I saw that (laughs), these women do not know what freedom is. Freedom for women... the women [in Islam] had freedoms since the 7th century that the European women still do not have!

(Imam, individual interview)

The demonstration that the Imam referred to was the 2010 anti-mosque protest organised by the group. During the interview the Imam downplayed assertions of women’s freedom articulated by mosque protestors by ascribing them to a false consciousness embraced by the European women who ‘do not know what freedom is’ and are consequently behind or still catching up with Muslim women who, he argued, have long enjoyed such freedoms. An alternative take on the issue of women’s rights in Islam was also articulated by Marian, a Polish Muslim convert:

It is not Islamic... that [a woman] should obey her husband, she is not his property, she is no more his property than he is hers... Listen, when it comes to women’s rights in Islam then we know about the rights since the 14th century and nothing has changed.

(Marian, individual interview)

Narratives mobilised by the Imam and by Marian can be read as attempts to shift the debate to emphasise freedom, or in the Imam’s narrative a certain superiority of Muslim women’s freedom. As such the Muslim men, by using similar narratives as

their opponents, attempted to shift geographies, highlighting the possibility of thinking differently about Muslim women's freedom from within Islam.

The Muslim women I talked to however did not emphasise the rights of women inherent to Islam. As primary targets for Islamophobia their narratives instead focussed on the challenges they faced day to day as a consequence of their assumed oppression. Dagmara, for example, expressed frustration at the suggestion that her Islamic identity was forced upon her by men. She talked of her experiences of returning to her home town from Warsaw where she now lives:

They cannot imagine that a person chose their religion by themselves and not through their husband or family, but themselves, from their own choice... I had this experience in [name of town]... either it is a bloke that forces me [to become Muslim] or when I said a bloke didn't force me then it must be that they pay me (Everyone laughs)

(Dagmara, focus group, Muslim woman)

The idea of women's agency is an especially exhausted narrative aimed at Muslim women in the context of resisting the imposition of (religious) tradition (Bracke 2008). Drawing on Talal Asad (1996) Bracke suggests that confining agency to 'a mode of integration into modernity' is an impoverishment of the idea (Bracke 2008: 62). In her study of Muslim women's piety, Saba Mahmood (2011) argues for a broadening of the understanding of agency taking it beyond solely acts of resistance to traditions and norms to also incorporate the acts of embracement and lived experience of these traditions and norms.

The Muslim women's group often used humour in tackling their frequent portrayals as victims. The group had an active presence on Facebook and other online sites which they used as a space to challenge Islamophobic discourses. They made extensive use of visual methods to challenge some of the narratives that were imposed on them; particularly a narrative assuming an understanding of women's liberation as going in tandem with their material visibility in public space (Scott 2007). The image below (Figure 6.1) is an example of how the Polish Muslims made use of the wider European Muslim *ummah* to counter narratives of their own rescue.



FIGURE C - 6.1 'WE WILL FREE YOU!'

Copyright: tuffix. Cartoon appeared on Facebook page of the women's group that were my participants)

Thinking back on global histories of Muslim women's resistance, the veil has played an important role in resisting oppression. In a different geopolitical setting, Muslim women insisted on wearing the veil as an act a resistance to the French appropriation of Algeria (Scott 2007). On a much smaller scale, the Muslim women in Poland are resisting the dominant anti-veil narratives by pursuing careers and having a visible media presence while also wearing the hijab and, crucially, demonstrating its fluidity across space and time, allowing them to influence the status quo. With that, the women referred to themselves as 'path breakers'. Another way in which the women challenge prejudice in Poland is through mobilising religious narratives and finding narratives that overlap with those of Catholics.

'VIRGIN MARY IS ALSO A HIJABI'

The narrative of the hijab linked with the oppression of women was at times interrupted by alternative understandings of the dominant narrative in Poland. Disruptions in the otherwise antagonistic tensions are highlighted here with the intention to discuss possibilities of more hopeful or agonistic spaces emerging in the ways that discourses on Muslim women are produced that challenge feminist and Islamophobic alliances. Some reactions to the hijab in Poland potentially encouraged a different type of conversation than one related to Muslims women's oppression. The unfamiliarity of the Islamic hijab gave rise to many different emotions including curiosity articulated at the sight of a headscarf. Working in medicine, Aisha and Dagmara, had a lot of contact with diverse groups. Wearing a headscarf at work sometimes allowed for the emergence of misunderstandings:

Dagmara: They sometimes don't know... sometimes they ask me whether I have cancer, really!

Aisha: Once a person who was sick with cancer came up to me, she had just had chemo and was in hospital and I was in hospital too but as a student so I didn't have the [doctor's] white coat on then yet. And she came up to me and asked how I did my scarf because it was so nice and I said 'I have got hair' and she said 'Oh I'm sorry, sorry' (Everyone laughs)

Nadia: But reactions are different. Sometimes in the tram someone would comment with curiosity... for example 'oh that is an imaginative way to tie a scarf' and they don't link it to religion but think that it is a style or a fashion. Once a lady even told me how fashionable it is with these scarves nowadays. Some people also think that I am from abroad, in the supermarket, they will speak to me in English, that is a standard. And even if I tell someone I am Polish, they will still not get that and say 'but where are you really from?'

(Muslim women, focus group)

One of the participants is a medical doctor and another one works in a health clinic. Within that context, their headscarves were sometimes understood to be a way of concealing chemotherapy treatment. The encounters are examples of people trying to understand something unfamiliar to them by linking what they see to their own experiences. These accounts embody a fluidity of the meaning of the hijab. Upon encountering the Muslim women in public spaces wearing headscarves some people commented on their fashionableness or imaginative styles. While the hijab is primarily an expression of religious belonging and adherence, it is also a fashion (Hoodfar 1997) that many Muslim women in Warsaw experiment with, making a point of their difference from the majority of the Polish population.

A key narrative that emerged in the Polish data and that will be further explored in the following chapter concerned the potential formation of inter-religious spaces of understandings, rooted in overlapping discourses. In these narratives, religion occupied a central role. Muslim women in Poland mobilised the Catholic sentiments of many Poles in order to establish a dialogue and understanding. When met with initial hostility or lack of understanding about their choice of observing the hijab, the women often brought up the example of the Virgin Mary who is a highly respected figure in Poland and, according to the Muslim women, also wore a hijab. While talking about it with lightness it pointed to a significant moment of overlapping narratives:

Lena: ... when you tell them that Virgin Mary also covered her hair then this works on older people and usually they stop for a second...

Dagmara: Consternation.

Lena: Yes, there is consternation when they cannot recall any image of Mary without her hair covered. And then it is really something strange, like they don't know what to say! But people in Poland, I think, are still more...

Aisha: It is curiosity, yes...

(Muslim women, focus group)

The mobilisation of the image of the Virgin Mary can be read as problematic in the hijab narratives due to the everydayness of the hijab in contrast to the elevated and holy image of the Virgin Mary that, as will be explored in the next case study, functions as a symbol of ideal and problematic womanhood⁴⁵. Still, in this case it is important because it mobilises a curiosity in contrast to the earlier evidenced hostility towards the hijab.

While curiosity is historically an ambivalent concept, entangled with the colonial explorations where curiosity was performed by certain privileged white male bodies (Phillips 2013), curiosity also has counter-hegemonic potential in my study. Drawing on Phillips (2013) and Sardar (2013) curiosity can also facilitate positive overlapping narratives between faiths. Interestingly these mobilisations were rooted in attempts to find commonality rather than point out civilisational differences between Muslim and non-Muslim people.

Marta, a mosque supporter, and the only one of my non-Muslim participants who had read the Quran and was positive towards the hijab, found a justification of the hijab in her religious understanding:

‘Religion is what they [Muslim women] love and they do it [wear the hijab] because of their own free will. People often think that if it is a Muslim woman then the scarf is coercion. But those I have spoken to, they do it because they love Allah, and that is most beautiful in all this.’

(Marta, focus group)

⁴⁵ I want to thank Azeezat Johnson for raising my attention to a critical reading of the mobilisation of the Virgin Mary in hijab narratives.

STRANGE ALLIES?

Alliances between feminist, racist, civilisational and nationalist agenda's might seem 'strange' and be deemed as 'unlikely bedfellows' (Bracke 2012: 241, Phillips 2008:22). Feminism is a diverse movement including many different, intersecting and overlapping but also conflicting strands. Black feminism, Islamic feminism, Christian feminism, ecofeminism, Chicana feminism, postcolonial feminism not to mention the divides between radical and liberal feminism – collectively, these movements cannot take the blame for engaging in Islamophobic or racist politics. However, it would be hasty to argue that the feminist movement is not complicit in Islamophobia and that feminist Islamophobia is only a matter of the cooption of the feminist agenda by non-feminist groups or nation states.

Saba Mahmood disarms claims of alliances between feminism and racism/Islamophobia as unlikely, strange or untrue by rejecting the idea that feminism has been hijacked to serve an imperial project, as she argues that 'such an argument would assume that democracy and feminism are strangers to the project of empire building' (Mahmood 2008:82). Assessing the 'strange alliance' between feminism, liberalism and Islamophobia, the analysis needs to be situated in the larger historical and political context of empire - traced through European colonialism and Western modernity (Maira 2011).

Feminism's entanglement with colonialism has been studied extensively by feminist (and) postcolonial scholars (Ahmed 1992, Spivak 1988, Scott 2007, Mahmood 2005, Alloula 1986). Civilising missions have often relied on the rhetoric of women's emancipation to serve as a rationale for colonial interventions (Bracke 2012, Scott 2007). The role that feminism has played in legitimising colonial interventions harks back to the narratives of liberation of 'native women' by Western countries (Mahmood 2008). As Bracke (2012) argues, the vindication of white civilised women has relied upon the Othering of women who become objects for the women's movement, in need of civilisation and saving. This Othering is also clearly evident in current clashes between the West and Islam.

Since its emergence the Western feminist movement has positioned itself in opposition to religion, deeming religious practices oppressive to women and religious beliefs hostile to the very idea of women's rights (Woodhead 2008).

Feminism's ambivalence towards religion and vice versa is long established. Western feminism has commonly adopted the Enlightenment view of religion and particularly that of secularisation theory assuming that religion will wither away in modern secular societies. As such, religion was traditionally not considered a priority for Western feminists except in looking beyond their vantage point as core white female protagonist towards women of colour and 'Third World Women' (Mohanty 2004), considered different and marked by their religion and culture (Reilly 2011). Feminist discourses have however accepted that religion is not going away and particularly since the war on terror narrative, have increasingly focused on Islam and crucially, on Muslim women (Fekete 2004). The growing visibility of religion in the public sphere, not least the example of the recent Islamic resurgence that has mobilised the adoption of the hijab by Arab women (Ahmed 2011) has resulted in calls for more academic attention devoted to the relationship between religion and feminism (Thomas and Brah 2011).

I echo a long tradition of third wave, postcolonial, black, Muslim and other feminists when arguing that a liberal white Western feminist movement has been complicit in racist and Islamophobic agendas (Amos and Parmar 2005; hooks 1981; Lorde 1984; Mohanty 1988; Walker 1974; Hill Collins 1986; Davis 1982; Zine 2002; Mahmood 2005; Ahmed 2011; Abu-Lughod 2002). Many of these important feminist accounts focused on the 'Third world women' emphasising feminist exclusion of Women of Colour:

Feminist studies discursively present Third world women as a homogenous, undifferentiated group leading truncated lives, victimized by the combined weight of 'their' traditions, cultures and beliefs, and 'our' (Eurocentric) history (Mohanty 1993: 42).

Feminism's complicity with racism has yet to be adequately addressed and as the editors of *Feminist Review* stated in 2001 this is becoming an increasingly obvious failing in the ever diversifying European populations:

'the growing presence and visibility of Muslims in European liberal democracies and the post-9/11 "war on terror" context has given urgency to debates on the contradictions, struggles but also reconciliations between feminism and Muslim religious practices' (Amir-Moazami, Jacobsen, and Malik 2011: 1)

The post-9/11 context has brought to the fore debates on the intersection between Western feminism and Muslim religious practices (Amir-Moazami, Jacobsen, Malik 2011). Old colonial tropes having been dusted off are again being used to deem Islam as traditional, patriarchal and illiberal. The ‘clash of civilisations’ paradigm functions as a re-enactment of past colonial discourses on women with feminism mobilised to liberalise Muslims and reform Islam (Mahmood 2008). Western feminism provides the intellectual justification for policies that target Muslim women in the name of fighting for their rights, speaking for them and ultimately, liberating them from Islam (Abu-Lughod 2002). Such ‘imperial feminism’ (see Amos and Parmar 2005) is preoccupied with women in hijab, ‘oppressed’ Muslim women requiring liberation from their tradition (Maira 2011:641). The editorial in the *Feminist Review* ends on an important note, one that encourages a continuous challenge to liberal feminisms’ complicity with racism and Islamophobia:

‘...feminism and liberal notions of individual rights, autonomy and gender justice have become intrinsic to the “government” of European Muslims. The challenge for feminists or other scholars at this moment is thus perhaps not so much to address the question of whether feminism is reconcilable with Islam or whether multiculturalism is bad for women, but rather to dismantle the theoretical, analytical and ethnographic interface, with their particular configurations of power, of the complex and internally heterogeneous traditions that we identify as ‘feminist’ and ‘Islamic’ (Amir-Moazami, Jacobsen, and Malik 2011: 6).

CONCLUSION

This chapter demonstrated that anti-Muslim narratives relied heavily on the appropriation of feminist discourses. Resurrecting the familiar orientalist tropes of oppressed Muslim women, the non-Muslim participants voiced opposition to mosques through discourses of women’s rights. Rooted in feminist (and) postcolonial literature (Mohanty 2004, Abu-Lughod 2002, Bracke 2012, Bilge 2010, Zine 2002, Scott 2007, Butler 2008, Spivak 1989, Brown 2008) the chapter illustrated how the narratives mobilised in Poland employed familiar tropes of the liberation of Muslim women. This chapter critically assessed the ease with which Western liberal feminist discourses were applied to the Polish context. This was explored through Jasbir Puar’s (2007) writing on exceptionalism which significantly complicates a seamless translation of narratives. The use of the women’s rights agenda evidenced a new way of opposing Islam in Poland.

In the beginning of this chapter I asked three questions inspired by Judith Butler and Saba Mahmood: How are gender and sexual politics mobilised in discourses on the mosque, Muslims and Islam? What are the local and global histories through which a certain production of knowledge originates? And finally, what alternative stories can function as seeds of possibility to challenge the more hegemonic narratives of Muslim women so often entangled together in problematic coalitions? The chapter's conclusion is two-fold. Firstly, it argues that the way in which Islamophobia in Poland is mobilised through mosque contestations in Warsaw point to a problematic endorsement of civilisational politics (with Muslim women and their bodies as central). It argues that such entanglements leave little room for agonistic contestations (Mouffe 2005). The second part of the conclusion is more hopeful. While non-Muslim participants echoed the debates from Western European countries focussing on the hijab as symbolising Islam's subjugation of women, this was not the only way in which the hijab was understood in my study. Instances of cross-over narratives and curiosity also created spaces for more hopeful geographies, particularly in non-secular spaces. This suggests that there are spaces where hegemonic alignments between sexual and civilisational politics can be transgressed opening up spaces of trust, curiosity and hope (Allen 2006; Mouffe 2005; Butler 2008; Phillips 2013). The themes emerging in this chapter will inform the discussion in the next and final chapter in this case study.

CHAPTER 6

SPACES OF TENSION, SPACES OF HOPE: THE SECULAR & THE RELIGIOUS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter maps out narratives that were expressed within secular and non-secular spaces in opposition to as well as in support of mosques, Muslims and Islam in Warsaw. The aim of this chapter is to identify and subsequently challenge the Islamophobic attitudes expressed by both secular and religious groups in Poland.

The chapter opens with a discussion of the Warsaw mosque conflicts in relation to a Habermasian conception of a secular liberal public sphere employed by the anti-mosque group Europe of the Future. The focus then shifts to discuss Catholic opposition to the mosque focussing on the attitudes rooted in a sacred rhetoric. Lastly, the chapter brings to the fore some more positive findings, leading to a discussion of the possibilities of counter-hegemonic geographies.

SECULAR TENSIONS

The first section of the chapter focuses on the claims at the very heart of the Warsaw mosque tensions – opposition rooted in a secular framework. The secular position was primarily articulated by the group Europe of the Future, who organised the 2010 mosque protest in Ochota. In this section I draw on an interview with their representative, Andrzej, attempting through his narrative to untangle the key claims of the Polish secularists.

The group situates itself within a European Enlightenment tradition where reason and individual rights are at the top of the stated agenda expressed through rationality and critique:

We argue that it is secularism in particular that has been key to European development. (Declaration, Europe of the Future, 2013)

The identification with European secularism as stated in the groups' declaration on their website, forms the foundation of the Polish groups' secular liberal framework as described by Andrzej:

We have a social agreement here, obviously, originating in a secular spirit and here we can speak about the philosophy of the Enlightenment

law... So when we critique political Islam... we critique it from the position of a secular country.

(Andrzej, individual interview)

PRIVATE ISLAM, PUBLIC ISLAM

We are not forbidding anyone from practicing Islam. Our work is not aimed at the spiritual layer [of the religion], but at its political and social influences. (Declaration, Europe of the Future, 2013)

The secularist group did not recognise any legitimacy in the claims by religion for space in the public sphere, instead, the group wanted Islam to be constrained to the private side of the public-private dichotomy:

When I speak of religion, the way I understand the right to religious belief is that it is obvious as long as it is a private matter.... as a path to salvation, liberation, whatever it might be, then this is obviously a private sphere, an intimate sphere, and I have got no right to interfere in that... now the Islamic culture does not recognise this division and does not accept it. And I would demand this division.

(Andrzej, individual interview)

The first key assumption to unpack here is the idea that the European public sphere is a neutral empty vessel untainted by religion. Calhoun has commented on this dichotomous relationship between private religion and public religion as misleading because religion has never been essentially private but often engaged publicly in wider movements – often in complicated ways (C. Calhoun 2011). Butler (2011) challenges Andrzej's narrative on the private place of religion in an imagined Enlightened European community where religion is solely a private matter:

'If the entry of religion into public life is a problem, then it would seem that we are presupposing a framework in which religion has been outside public life, and we are asking about how it enters and whether it enters in a justifiable or warranted way. But, if this is the operative assumption, it seems we have to ask first how religion became private and whether the effort to make religion private ever really succeeded.'
(Butler 2011:71)

Historical manifestations of religion in the public sphere, particularly the key role played by religion in social justice movements such as the anti-slavery and civil rights movements, were not recognised in the secular narratives of my participants. With regards to secularist demands of translation of religious language, Charles

Taylor asks: ‘Were Martin Luther King’s secular compatriots unable to understand what he was arguing for when he put the case for equality in biblical terms?’ (Taylor 2011:58). This exemplifies the fact that civil society was mobilised within a non-secular public sphere through non-secular means.

The most pertinent example is of course the crucial role played by the anti-Communist Catholic civil society in Poland challenging the crude public/private dichotomy demanded by the Polish secularists (Casanova 2004). The Church was a key actor in the mobilisation of civil society in opposition to the Communist regime and in this role was heavily dependent on the fluidity between the public and the private sphere (Casanova 2008). During Communism, the Sunday mass was more than a gathering for congregational prayer. Danuta Walesa⁴⁶ remembered the Sunday mass as a chance to meet, organise and strategise with fellow opposition movement colleagues in a safe space (Wałęsa 2011). In this context, the public sphere was not a safe space. The secularist group’s critique of Islam for operating beyond its rightful place in the private sphere should also presumably be equally applicable to Catholicism.

The second key assumption to unpack in the secularist narrative is that of the irrationality of religion versus the inherent rationality of a secular public sphere:

We are looking at how Islam is politically entangled, to put it simply. We are interested in social manifestations of the political activism, strictly political activism. So we are not interested in Islam on a theological level because we realise that every theological discussion is really a discussion around faith and fundamentally is devoid of rationality.

(Andrzej, individual interview)

Mendieta and Vanantwerpen (2011) point out, understandings of religion as private and irrational and the public sphere as a space for rational deliberation have long been permeating scholarly debate. This, they argue, has undergone change in recent years:

‘Religion is neither merely private...nor purely irrational. And the public sphere is neither a realm of straight-forward national deliberation

⁴⁶ Danuta Walesa is the wife of Lech Walesa, the former leader of the Solidarnosc opposition movement.

nor a smooth space of unforced assent.’ (Mendieta & Vanantwerpen 2011:1)

When religion is understood as devoid of rationality and hence pointless to engage with, it confirms the binaries that feed the modern secular discourse between belief and knowledge, imagination and reason, the sacred and the profane (Asad 2003). Such binaries reflect a perceived superiority of secular reason as universally valid, as propagated by Habermas (1991).

The secularist narrative presents the public sphere as an empty space that can be filled, yet only with rational and secular discourses as this is what is understood as universally valid and neutral. This demand for the religious to be translated into the secular vernacular, to ‘deliberate in a language of reason alone, leaving their religious views in the vestibule of the public sphere’ has been described as tyrannical (Charles Taylor 2011a: 49). Following this logic, if religious reason arrives at contrary conclusions to secular reason, religion becomes dangerous and disruptive and therefore needs to be set aside (Taylor 2011). The narratives of the secularists suppressed religion through emphasising the superiority of rational argument that they understood to be incompatible with a religious framework (see Mouffe 2005). Mouffe (2005: 129) argues that the secular liberal framework where conflicting (religious) values are suppressed through rational universality, as echoed by the secularist group, creates conditions for ‘antagonistic struggle’.

The third key assumption to unpack in the narrative is that religion, particularly Islam, must be confined to the private sphere. Many Muslim participants disagreed with the conception of Islam as private and with the rigid dichotomy over where the sacred starts and ends. In a recent interview reported in the Polish media a Muslim convert argued that ‘it is not possible for a Muslim to lead a completely secular life’ (Gasior 2014: 1). Talal Asad (2003) argues that the entrance of a religion into the public sphere on its own terms may ‘have to’ disrupt and threaten existing assumptions:

‘the introduction of new discourses may result in the disruption of established assumptions structuring debates in the public sphere. More strongly: they may have to disrupt existing assumptions to be heard. Far from having to prove to existing authority that it is no threat to dominant values, a religion that enters political debate on its own terms may on

the contrary have to threaten the authority of existing assumptions.’
(Asad 2003: 185)

Muslim women in my study found it important to emphasise that their religion was not private (focus group with Muslim women). The narratives of the Muslim women reflected a challenge to the idea of a rational public sphere neutral of religious sentiment (C. Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, and Vanantwerpen 2011) and shed more light on the hopeful possibilities of Islam’s role in challenging staid secularist conceptions of the public sphere:

Oliwia: What frightens non-Muslims, or what they can’t understand, is that religion in a Western sense is something private, like you go to your temple, you have something at home, you will pray when you feel like it, and so on. Islam is not like that, of course it depends on how every person understands it, but really... many people accuse Islam of not being a religion but an ideology and true, it is. I always say ‘yes you are right’!

Dagmara: Because it is concerned with every aspect of life and you don’t divide the sacred and profane...

Oliwia: Yes it relates to all things in society, what to do, what to eat, what to wear and so on.

Dagmara: Every sphere of life. Relations within your family, relations with your neighbour.

Oliwia: There is no division in Islam between sacred and profane like there is so deeply engraved into the European culture. And when a person sees that someone doesn’t drink alcohol, doesn’t eat pork, they think that this has such a big influence on my life. And then that you pray five times a day is for some understood as extremism that you just need to pray, like, why can’t you wait and later go to a mosque and pray? But that you need to pray five times a day and overall that you speak about the religion so much... And it is a bit like that, Islam is really touching on all spheres of life, right? And for someone who does not fully understand it, they see Islam as something possessive, that it will come here and rule everything, that it will tell women to put on the headscarf, it will stone all non-Muslims and so on. So if it influences the individual so much, it means that if Muslims will be in the majority it will influence everyone in this way. And this also comes from a lack of understanding and looking at it a bit from the outside, because from the outside it really can look a bit dangerous. People say sometimes that we want to have our own courts and so on and in Islam even the legal things

are defined, such as division of wealth, divorce and all this is too much for people... that it goes into a sphere where religion should not be.

(Dagmara and Oliwia, focus group, Muslim women)

The way that Asia articulated the inseparable nature of her belief to her public actions is consistent with a more fluid nature of belief where leaving her religion in the private was neither desirable nor possible, not least because she was visibly Muslim. The female participants, who often wore the hijab, despite being white and Polish, did not always 'pass as white'.

The emphasis that Muslim women placed on the role of Islam in the public sphere corresponds to feminist interventions on the destabilisation of the public/private dichotomy (Jeffreys 2011; Valentine 1993; Namaste 1996):

'In the midst of a widespread resurgence of interest in the public importance of religion, there has been an increasingly sophisticated series of intellectual interventions challenging us to reconsider our most basic categories of research, analysis, and critique. Just as, in an earlier period, feminists and other scholars raised fundamental questions about the meaning of the public and its relation to the private, today the very categories of the religious and the secular – and of secularism and religion – are being revisited, reworked and rethought' (Mendieta and Vanantwerpen 2011: 1)

By being visibly Muslim and female, the women troubled the dichotomy between private and public in several intersecting ways. For the women, the secularist's demands to leave their religions at the door step before entering the public sphere was contradictory to their understanding of their religion.

Some Muslim participants did however focus on their religion as primarily a relationship between themselves and God implying that they were less interested in Islam influencing the public sphere (interview with Marek) or arguing that Islam, particularly because of its small number of followers living in Warsaw, need not be visible in the Polish public sphere (interviews with Marek and Hubert). Significantly, these were statements made by male Polish converts to Islam, those enjoying the privilege afforded them by their gender and whiteness, people not racialised as Muslims on an everyday basis (see Meer and Modood 2010).

GOOD MUSLIM, BAD MUSLIM

The way that the anti-mosque group distinguished some Muslims from others reflected dichotomous binaries established between the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ Others (Valentine 2010) or between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Muslims (Mamdani 2004). Europe of the Future and other secularist/atheist groups were prepared to tolerate only a difference that was reformed and hence became devoid of its difference (Sardar and Suroor 2006). This was narrated well by Marek, a convert to Islam, talking about his encounters with the secularist group:

However you would try and reform it would still not be satisfactory... This one guy [name removed] he spoke about what they expect of Muslims, apostasy. Meaning, a good Muslim is a former Muslim. So this means that you cannot be a good Muslim...

(Marek, individual interview)

Marek engaged with some people associated with the secularist group through the platform of an online magazine called Racjonalista [Rationalist]. As the exchange in the magazine evidenced, the secularists accepted the invitation for dialogue based on their assumption that Marek himself was one of the ‘reformed’ Muslims and so recognised the dangers that the ‘bad’ kind of Islam could bring for everyone, including Muslims. In an article the secularists said:

We have for years been more than happy to publish voices of Muslims who oppose radical, political Islam and who understand, that this kind of Islam is a threat to themselves. Dialogue between people, who accept each other is possible. (Racjonalista 2012)

Such an invitation already sets certain boundaries in terms of participation. The idea of the reformed Islam that Europe of the Future entertained was for Marek implausible. Over a period lasting several months Marek attempted dialogue with the secularists. Eventually, he had to stop the engagement, claiming that he found in this endeavour only dead-ends and was unable to identify any shared platform to build upon:

If you attempt to try and define what kind of Islam suits them then this starts to be... I mean, there is no Islam that would suit them. Once you start talking to them, ok so what kind of Islam is good... there is no such Islam. This is kind of the way that the conversation runs.

(Marek, individual interview)

Marek got the impression that for the secularists a good Muslim was a former Muslim. This level of compromise demanded by the secularists of the Muslims was further exemplified by The Agreement Card initiative proposed by Europe of the Future to the Muslim group building the Ochota mosque. As outlined on the group's webpage, the Muslim group was expected to sign a declaration of agreement before the secularist group 'allowed' them to construct the mosque in Ochota unopposed. Europe of the Future stated:

'We introduce The Agreement Card [*Karta Porozumienia*], the signing of which should calm mosque opponents, as well as allowing Muslims that view their religion in a moderate way, to function in our country without hindrance' (Europa Przyszlosci 2010).

The reforms suggested in the anti-mosque groups Agreement Card went as far as demanding of Muslims in Warsaw to renounce parts of the Quran and the Hadith. Concretely, the Agreement Card asked for 17 different Quranic verses to be 'interpreted differently' and for Muslim organisations to 'release new interpretations' of these Quranic verses (Europa Przyszlosci 2010). The secularist group outlined the rules for Muslims to play by in order to prove their allegiance to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Europe Przyszlosci 2010). Norbert, another member of the secularist group, explained that the Europe of the Future understands Islam as in need of change and interpretation, demanding for it to take steps away from the Shari'a (interview with Norbert).

By proposing reforms to the Warsaw Muslims the secularist group aimed at erasing difference that they perceived as immoderate and 'allowed' the moderate or reformed Muslims, in other words those qualifying as 'good Muslims' (see Mamdani 2004), to function in Poland without hindrance.

Troubling the notion of tolerance, Valentine (2008) points to the crucial difference between tolerance and respect, where tolerance does not necessitate positive attitudes but can be limited to containment of negative attitudes or reflect exoticisation. Furthermore, Valentine (2008) links tolerance discourse to assimilation and difference. She argues, the 'good' Others represent groups that can become more like what is defined as Us *despite* their Otherness. In contrast, the 'bad' Others are groups that are not as easily, or perhaps unwillingly, assimilated and where a difference is maintained (Valentine 2008).

Muslims that were not considered as moderate or were unwilling to meet the demands for reform that the secularist group proposed, such as Marek and other Muslim participants, were disqualified at the start of the dialogue. Such a view of the Warsaw public sphere, void of its ‘otherness’ has also been fittingly summarised by Slavoj Žižek as a ‘decaffeinated’ public sphere (Žižek 2010).

Failing to gain any traction with their Agreement Card initiative the secularist group gave up approaching the Muslim groups. Instead their activities moved ‘underground’. When I met Norbert from the mosque opposition group he said that despite the Agreement Card not being signed the group planned to retain control over the ‘Muslim situation’ by monitoring the mosque ‘by going there and listening to the messages’ that, to them, were potentially harmful (interview with Norbert).

Reading Danielle Allen (2006), such disqualification as a result of lack of reform does the opposite of mobilising trust, instead it disallows difference and opens up antagonisms that fuel Islamophobia. She argues that trust is essential in opening up spaces of hope and reaping the benefits to be gained from talking to strangers. Unfortunately, as this part of the chapter evidences; trust was not built. Instead, the findings suggest antagonistic relations between the secularists and the Warsaw Muslims.

RACIALISING AND CARICATURING MUSLIMS

The racialising and caricaturing of minority religious populations has a long and disturbing history. Meer (2013) takes the example of how the Prophet Muhammad⁴⁷ has been described along racial lines and Muslims as a group have been associated with animals, similarly to how Jews were associated with a particular smell (Meer 2013). Agamben, highlights the racial history of Jewish and Muslim people⁴⁸ with the example of the usage of the term *Muselmann* or its plural *Muselmanner*, which was ‘Auschwitz jargon for the "walking dead"’ (Janion 2006: 199). Agamben (1999) notes that one of the theories of the origin of the term *Muselmann* was linked to the Arabic understanding of the word ‘Muslim’ meaning the one who submits to God. Interestingly, the *Muselmanner* were seen as embodying a state that was

⁴⁷ I use the spelling of the Prophet’s name consistently throughout this thesis as ‘Muhammad’ yet in different account, such as the quoted paper by Meer (2013) the Arabic name is spelled differently.

⁴⁸ Racialisation of Jewish and Muslim people also took place simultaneously and across different sites such as different Jewish camps as explored by Rana (2007): RANA, J. 2007 ‘The story of Islamophobia’, *Souls*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 148-61

beyond human, the term was used by the Nazi's to describe the embodiment of the apathetic future that awaited the prisoners (Agamben 1999).

Europe of the Future's web- and Facebook pages included several examples of imagery of Muslim men, often portrayed in orientalist and static ways, dressed in 'traditional clothing' (see Lewis 2009). These presented a wider tendency to portray Muslims 'through a series of demonised images' that tend to focus on:

'the sensational, the extreme and the exotic, all of which operates to reinforce simplistic understandings and crude representations of Muslims in the West'. (Hopkins 2009: 35)

One such example depicts the protagonist dressed in 'traditional' clothing (see Lewis 2009), signifying that he is a Muslim and helping to mark the figure as illiberal, un-European, irrational and violent. During a session of 'Cartoon Therapy', the character in the cartoon at first embraces the caricatures presented to him. He is particularly amused when the cartoons target Jewish people, yet reacts violently when the group he identified with were the objects of critique.

The cartoon reflects the figure of the post 9/11 Muslim folk devil that Pnina Werbner (2013) argues is key to anti-Muslim discourses, representing a figure that is constantly 'in your face' telling people what they should not do and intruding into 'our' personal sphere (Werbner 2013). Unable to laugh at the caricature of the Prophet Muhammad, the cartoon figure confirms his distance to core European values by exemplifying 'Muslim rage' (see Lewis 1990; Huntington 1993) acting out through the sword that seems to come pre-packaged with his Muslim identity, consequently confirming his religious fundamentalism (Brown 2009) and exemplifying familiar tropes of violence and imposition on the secular European public sphere (Werbner 2013).

The promotion of such cartoons was justified by the secularists as promoting the freedom of speech. The group's webpage was filled with quotes emphasising this:

'Freedom is the right to tell people what they do not want to hear'.
(Europe of the Future website)

Critique was understood by Europe of the Future as intrinsic to freedom, therefore to European values, and therefore also to Poland. This domino-like set of

assumptions frequently presented by the anti-mosque participants in Warsaw entertained a threat to Europe by its 'imagined global opposite' (Brown 2006).

Europe of the Future drew on the experiences of Polish Communism when emphasising the importance of freedom of expression. Having fresh memories of Communist rule during which freedom of expression was curbed and any critique was subject to censorship, Andrzej emphasised how important it was to avoid such curbs on freedom. Asad (2003: 186) writes about the secularist 'insist[ance] that organised religion, being founded on authority and constraint, has always posed a danger to the freedom of the self as well as to the freedom of others'. This is seen in contrast to a secularism that 'permitted the essential self to make and defend itself' (Asad 2003: 186).

Andrzej frequently brought up the controversy around the Danish cartoons satirising the Prophet Muhammad. Andrzej's defence of the cartoons was consistent with the broader European response to treating the controversy as an exercise of freedom of speech that needed to be defended (C. Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, and Vanantwerpen 2011):

Kasia: So what was the intention [of the Danish cartoons], according to you?

Andrzej: It was about the fact that there was no cartoonist that dared to depict a caricature of Muhammad. And he [the cartoonist] went against that, saying that it was his freedom, he was in his own country.

Kasia: But why do we want to do it?

Andrzej: Because this is our right. Why do we want to do it? Because, as I said, if we want to proclaim a thesis that Islam is part of Europe, than its critique is also part of Europe.

K: But in what way is caricaturing Muhammad a critique? I am thinking of the intentions still...

A: The intention is that the cartoonist opposed what he thought was a reduction of the sphere of freedom... The caricature is somehow the essence of Europeanness, the fact that I can laugh at things.

(Andrzej, individual interview)

Adapting the cartoon debate to the Polish context was a particularly challenging undertaking at a time when several 'blasphemy cases' have captured the imagination

of the Polish public sphere⁴⁹, acting as a pertinent reminder of the continuing role played by the Polish Catholic Church and the seriousness with which critique of the Church is treated⁵⁰.

Whether communicated through cartoons or other media, the secularist group argued that the critique of Islam that they promoted was not intended to be offensive towards Muslims and hence could not be read as Islamophobia or racism:

Kasia: Many Muslims feel insulted because of the cartoons...

Andrzej: And again, the question is whether they are insulted or whether they *choose* to be insulted.

(Andrzej, individual interview, *my emphasis*)

Andrzej argued that the difference ridiculed in the cartoons was a religious difference and not a racialisation of Muslims and thereby not racist⁵¹. Andrzej's narrative changed the moment the target of caricature was a group whose racialisation he accepted such as in the case of a racist depiction of the US president Barack Obama:

Kasia: I remember that recently in a newspaper there was a cartoon of [Barack] Obama portrayed as a monkey. What do you think of that, is that ok?

Andrzej: This is something else you know. This is about taste...

K: Would you allow such a caricature?

A: Would I forbid such a caricature if it was up to me? I would regard it as disgusting, simply revolting, devoid of good taste.

K: But would you allow it?

A: But the question is why? What would be the intention?

K: Could the same question not be asked of the [Danish] cartoons?

A: Yes and we know the answer to that question. If the cartoonist tells me that he did it not to offend but to highlight the terror of political

⁴⁹ Artist Dorota Nieznalska made an installation with parts of a male's body. After initially being sentenced with blasphemy laws, the judgement got repealed and in 2008 the artist won the case in an appeal court (Sienkiewicz 2006).

⁵⁰ Priest Boniecki engaged in conversation with an artist that burned a Bible on stage and as a consequence the Church hierarchy imposed a ban on his public speaking.

⁵¹ Reference: tariq modood on choice and racialisations of muslims

correctness, then I understand that. And you know, this is about artistic creativity. If someone goes out on the street and spits then the question is in what context? Then it is not to show limitations but to be an idiot. The whole point here is the centrality of the European culture that is rooted in this dialectic.

(Andrzej, individual interview)

On the one hand, as Talal Asad (Asad 2009) suggests, critique had no limits. On the other hand, while some groups could be critiqued (Muslims), critique was not appropriate to other groups, those whose racialisation was accepted. Yet this was only applicable to groups who were understood to be capable of being racialised.

As such, the dialogue evidences limits to caricature accepted by Andrzej, despite his emphasising the centrality of critique and debate to European culture and identity where ‘everything is subject to critical engagement’ (Asad 2009: 36). As the exchange shows, Andrzej recognised that offense can be caused due to racist stereotyping yet did not find offence problematic when the target of stereotyping was a religion. His reasoning being that religion, in contrast to race, was understood to be a choice. According to Andrzej, while cartoons portraying people of colour in abusive ways were accepted as unacceptably offensive, if Muslim people were offended by the cartoons, it is because they ‘chose’ to be insulted.

Drawing from Tariq Modood, such narratives can be understood as rooted in the perception of ‘race as ascription and religion as choice’ (Modood 2010: 10). This reflects a more general gap in the understanding of racism within Islamophobia⁵² (Meer 2013). Modood argues that the idea that there exists a division between race and religion no longer holds (Modood 2010). Looking back, some have argued that the division never truly held (Meer 2013). As Mignolo noted, a 16th century definition of race equated the term with ‘blood’ and ‘religion’ (Mignolo 2010: 19). Looking back, Nasar Meer (2013:3) draws on historical accounts to argue that:

‘there is ample evidence that religious culture and biology are deemed as co-constitutive of a racial category prior to its articulation in Atlantic slavery and Enlightenment-informed colonial encounters’

⁵² This gap is filled only slightly more in the case of anti-Semitism and racism, argues Meer (2013).

The narratives of the secularists entertain racialised categories that saturated cultural portrayals of Muslim people, yet were not being recognised by them as linked to racism:

If someone critiques Islam then it is very easy to push this person into the category of being a xenophobe, racist and so on. But it is obvious if we look at the concept of racism then the amount of pigment in one's skin means absolutely nothing... to me whether someone has one or another skin colour is absolutely irrelevant.

(Andrzej, individual interview)

Europe of the Future maintained a strict dichotomy between racism and criticism of Islam, failing to recognise the racialisation they subjected Muslims to.

This section has shown how a secularist framework emphasising critique can facilitate a justification of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism. In this section I argued that when mobilised by the anti-mosque group, the insistence on critique through racist imagery strengthens what Asad (2009:56) argues is an 'ideological status of European Muslims as not fully human because they are not yet morally autonomous and politically disciplined'.

Asserting Islam's distance to the secular principles of Europe, Muslims were viewed by the Polish group as radical 'Others' (Meer and Modood 2010) and their claims to public space regarded with unease and deemed difficult to accommodate (Cesari 2013). Zia Sardar (Sardar and Suroor 2006: 1) argues that this is a sign of the failure of Western societies to provide a space for difference to exist as difference. Europe of the Future demanded not only a public-private division in the way Islam was claiming space, but also insisted on Islam's reform – in order to fit into a secular European public sphere. To them, Muslim difference was understood as something that needs not to be accommodated, but reformed.

As such the secularist position departs from the Polish context by not taking into consideration the very religiously entangled civil society in Poland, one that cannot be properly understood using only Western European notions of civil society (Haynes 2009; Keane 1988) and particularly not using the Western division between the public and the private. This strict division between public and private religion is simply not historically plausible, particularly when looking at the Polish context.

CATHOLIC TENSIONS

This section maps how the opposition to the mosque that was articulated within a religious framework touching upon aspects of Polish national identity and the idea of a transnational Catholic community. Religious opposition to mosques and Muslims was for some of the participants the main motivation behind the mosque conflicts in the Ochota and Włochy neighbourhoods. In contrast to the secularist mosque opposition that mobilised a European secular identity, the religiously motivated opposition emphasised a Polish national, Catholic, identity.

While religiously-rooted opposition is not unusual in mosque tensions across Europe (McLoughlin 2005, Dunn 2001), the religious aspect in mosque conflicts has been particularly evident in places in which there has been an active presence of a dominant Christian religion in the public sphere such as in Spain and Italy (Cesari 2005, Saint-Blancat, and Friedberg 2005) as well as in Greece where the role of the Orthodox Church determined an understanding of difference shaped along religious lines (Triandafyllidou and Gropas 2009).

The Catholic opposition of the participants was found to run along two main geographical and political lines – a local and a global. In some cases the local and the global were interlinked.

CATHOLIC POLAND: LOCAL OPPOSITION

A commonly articulated reason among participants opposing the mosque constructions was rooted in a perceived threat of an outnumbering of Catholic churches by mosques which was further linked to a fear of the weakening of the Catholic tradition.

We are not against them for who they are! Really, we don't mind either Jehovah's Witnesses, or Jews or Hindus, they don't bother us. But let's not exaggerate because, as I say, soon... if you let them once, second time and third time and then a tenth time then there will be more mosques because a city won't find the basis to reject them and there will be more of them than of our Catholic churches!

(Krystyna and Sylwia, paired interview, Włochy neighbourhood)

This comment was one of many critical responses from Krystyna and Sylwia, both living in close proximity to the planned Włochy mosque construction. Both argued that they were not against mosques in principle but emphasised the need to limit the

number of mosques, especially in their neighbourhood that, as was discussed in the earlier chapter, had been losing out in the larger geographies of Warsaw.

Krystyna and Sylwia stressed their belonging to the Church and subsequently to the Catholic faith. Both women linked the presence of mosques in their locality to a broader threat to Catholics and Christianity. Their opposition to the mosque reflected their religious sentiments and also the worries of the majority regarding the weakening influence of the Church in the Polish public sphere (Kozłowska 2013). In the framework of Charles Taylor's (1999) modes of secularism, Krystyna and Sylwia feared the loss of the dominance of one faith, their faith, corresponding to 'secularisation 3'⁵³. They were responding to a diversification of faith where religion – in this case Catholicism – becomes only one of the possible options of belief (Charles Taylor 2011b).

A Christian identity is also central to the understanding of Europe (Mavelli 2008). Though today largely secularised, in many Western European countries the presence of a religious discourse around the mosque was understood as a sign of locals 'rediscovering their Christian roots' (Allievi 2009: 86). Nycz argues, that this is particularly important in Poland since its Christian heritage functions as one important aspect of a shared European identity between Poland and other countries on the continent and as such it functions as a binding force (Nycz 2012) sustaining a nostalgic view of an imagined community of a united Christian Europe.

As such, the reactions to mosque constructions were tightly linked with the national Catholic identity of Poland (Nycz 2012). In the strong loyalty to Catholicism that came through in the discussions participants dismissed Islam on the assumption that Islam went against their own Catholic beliefs. Such sentiments echo Gale's (2005) findings in England where people deemed Islam a false religion because they perceived England to be a Christian country:

There is one councillor, one of the most conservative ones, and his main argument [is] that he believes only in one God and therefore the mosque cannot be erected. So indeed, these voices do come up, I did hear these things being shouted out, yes, yes, people say that they believe, that they

⁵³ Secularism 1: Decreasing religious presence in the public sphere Secularism 2: Diminishing of religious practices and Secularism 3: Growth of pluralism of religious views , beliefs and values where Christianity becomes one of many options

are Catholics and believe in one God and therefore they will not allow for a mosque to be built here, yes there are such voices.

(Local councillor, Włochy, Mosque neighbourhood)

In contrast to many Western European countries, Poland has had a long established Tatar Muslim minority population who are identified as Polish (Dziekan 2011). My data suggests that while people were generally positive towards the ‘indigenous’ Polish Muslims, the attitudes towards more recent Muslims immigrants reflected the threat of the Muslim Other, often imported from Western media discourse (Pedziwiatr 2011). This contradiction in the way different types of Muslims were seen, divided between the ‘good’ Tatar Muslims and the ‘bad’ Arab Muslims, rendered the relationship with Islam fraught:

To me the religion in itself is not a threat. I think the issue is only how the religion will coexist with our religion and generally Muslims with Poles... because up until now Muslims were associated with... I mean the Warsaw Muslims were for Poles associated with the Tatars, who fought in the war in the 1920s, later they were officers of the Polish army in 1939, they were always on our side, they were fighting... they were somehow a part of the society, a part of Poland... they were very integrated and in no way were they a threat. From 2001 things changed, from 11th of September, the vision of what a Muslim is changed, it is obvious now, a Muslim is what most people associate with a terrorist, right, and therefore people are afraid of this kind of proximity.... The local residents who contacted me argued that they did not want to live next to the mosque, not because it is a Muslim building but because it is a terrorist building and so is unwanted. So it was like that. It was not about us being Catholic and them being Muslims we cannot talk on these grounds.

(Ochota Councillor, individual interview)

The worry expressed by the local residents about giving up land to the ‘Other’ corresponded to the fears of ‘Otherness’ of Muslims and particularly in what was understood as the violence assumed to be inherent in Islam:

I am a little bit against it. Because as I said, I haven’t read the Quran but from what I understand Islam is a more aggressive religion than for example Christianity.

(Patrycja, focus group, Ochota neighbourhood)

Difference was asserted in terms of religious differences but was also influenced by media narratives reinforced by the reporting of the events of 9/11 and subsequent terrorist attacks:

How would I know that one idiot won't go mad and won't drive his car into a building that is next door because he will feel like it? Because there will be something that he might not like because of his faith and because we Christians live just next door and something will happen in his brain and he will get it in his head that there should be no Christians?

(Sylwia, paired interview, Włochy)

A common saying 'Pole-Catholic' is symbolic of the centrality of the religion in the national identity of its citizens (Nycz 2012). The inseparable nature of the religious and national identity of the participants was evident in the interchanging narratives portraying Islam as being a threat to the local neighbourhood and to the local residents who were Catholics.

CATHOLIC POLAND: GLOBAL OPPOSITION

Some of the negative attitudes towards the mosque were rooted in the participants' sense of belonging to a global Catholic community:

Adriana: To me building these mosques and bringing this religion [Islam] to Poland is just crazy. Everyone is trying to get rid of them [Muslims] in their countries...

Kasia: And which countries are you talking about precisely?

Adriana: European countries. Because they know that they cause religious conflicts. We see it abroad... when a Pole goes to Africa where this religion [Islam] is present and they do not respect Catholics at all. But Poles will build them [mosques]... on our soil.

(Adriana, paired interview, Ochota neighbourhood)

Perceived discrimination against Christians in Muslim majority countries has become an obstacle for Muslim mosque building in Western countries (Allievi 2009). Adriana's explanation of the treatment that she had experienced in a Muslim majority country had an impact on how she felt about Muslims back in Poland. This pointed to a certain way that anti-Catholic behaviour travelled back to Poland with the agency of Adriana. As such, Adriana connected the local and the global

indicating the fluidity of the ways in which Islamophobia travels between transnational contexts (A. Gawlewicz and Narkowicz 2014).

Such sentiments were evident even among those who had not travelled to Muslim countries. Participants were against the mosque because of their knowledge of discrimination suffered by Christians in Muslim countries. This seemed to provide the intrinsically sceptical attitudes towards mosque building held by many of the participants with tangible reasons upon which they could hang their objections:

Krystyna: This is a Christian Catholic country and I do not think that they should have mosques every few metres! Because in their countries they do not allow Christians to build Christian churches, Catholic churches every few metres.

Kasia: And (turning to Sylwia) do you also think like that about the mosque and church...

Sylwia : Exactly like this, exactly...

K: And let's say a country that would start building churches, a Muslim country. Would you then be more optimistic if there would be churches in Muslim countries?

K: I don't think so...

S: One in their whole country, so to say, then maybe...

K: Well they do have them [churches] there but from what I read on the internet they are every hundred or few hundred metres apart, so that is... what are we talking about? (laughs) To the Zesłancow Syberyjskich (Ochota mosque area) we are about six kilometres away! (laughs)

K: But if they [Muslims] would open up more for Christian religion...

S: But it is obvious they would not open up because this is their Quran that says it.

K: And should we here in Poland then open up, to be the first to step forward...

K: No!

S: No.

(Krystyna & Sylwia , paired interview, Włochy neighbourhood)

When prompted to engage with the idea of moving beyond this conflict of reciprocity, the women refused. Their disinterest in taking the first step towards building positive relations was underpinned by the claim that the Quran advises Muslims to not ‘open up’ towards Christians. Such acts of reciprocity have been expressed even in more secular settings such as Germany where calls for mosque bans were bolstered on the grounds of difficulties with church construction in Muslim countries (Allievi 2009).

The Catholic participants’ narratives did not necessarily reflect accurate knowledge of Muslim countries or the inter-faith relations in different geopolitical contexts and instead would often rely on skewed media images and knowledge that they had gathered from the Internet (Pedziwiatr 2011). In a focus group with local residents in the Ochota neighbourhood, for example, participants made some vague claims about churches not being allowed to be built in Islamic countries:

Paweł: Like it is not allowed to build Catholic churches somewhere in Syria... on the Syrian side of Turkey, in Turkey...

Pola: So why would we agree that they build their temple here?

Paweł: Right.

Pola: Because building churches is something different but is it easy to be a Catholic in such Islamic countries? This is something different, I mean, to build a church or Orthodox... is not a problem I would think. But how these people would be perceived and whether they could practice a different religion in these countries, I don’t know, really.

(Focus group, Ochota neighbourhood)

The opposition among Catholic participants based on discrimination against Christians in Muslim-majority countries was also picked up by the secularist group, Europe of the Future. The group recognised that their opposition to Islam based on liberal secularism did not sit comfortably within the Polish context where their arguments were not obvious to many Catholics. While acknowledging it as being out-of-character, the secularist group nevertheless incorporated in their magazine *Euroislam* the theme of Christian oppression of Muslims arguing that Christians are being ‘wiped out’ from Muslim majority countries:

Our readers and all our followers might have been surprised by the topic we recently decided to engage with. Despite our commitment to the values of secular humanism and a deep distance to all religions and their

dogmas and truths, we decided to focus on the issue of discrimination of Christians. We have been following the situation of Christians in Muslim countries with horror.’ (Euroislam 2013)

The Muslim group too picked up on the issue of Christian discrimination as a ground for anti-mosque and anti-Muslim sentiments. They challenged the assumptions of the participants regarding the lack of churches in Muslim countries:

Karolina: Often there are accusations that you run rampant here and Christians have issues in the Middle East. From my own experience when I was in Tunisia I saw a lot of churches and no one had an issue with them.

Asiyah: It is only one country where there are no churches... because why build a church if the country has got no Christians?

Karolina: But they do invite Christians to come to work so I think they should count that in and they should allow churches.

Asiyah: And in Bagdad there are about 33 churches, or even 40, and these are almost empty because the number of Christians is not big so there is like one person per church, but why not, everybody has got a church close by.

(Muslim women’s focus group)

The Imam had a similar critique to the Muslim women. He emphasised the accommodation of and tolerance towards Christians in Muslim countries:

Imam: Christians in Muslim countries have the right to farm pigs, produce alcohol etcetera. And we are now here and people say that we want to build mosques here but in our countries there are no...

Kasia: There are no churches...

Imam: ... no churches. So welcome to Syria, to Jordan, To Lebanon, to Egypt, to Iraq, to Algeria. Where there are or have been Christians there are still churches, the Muslims did not take these down, but instead they also built mosques. There has been Muslims that have been unfair while in power, but those who have been fair made it possible for both [religions] to practice.

(Imam, individual interview)

Quoting Aristotle, Danielle Allen (2006: 135) emphasises that ‘for the purpose of achieving some benefit in common’ there is a need for communicating plans when

living together with strangers. In this case, the benefit in common was the establishment of places of worship for religious minorities – Christians in Muslim majority countries and Muslims in Christian majority countries. Yet it was reciprocity, rather than common benefit resulting from mutual communication, that took priority in this study.

For the anti-mosque Catholics, Muslim groups in their local Warsaw neighbourhood were regarded as lesser neighbours than were the Christians living far away. The imagined community worked across religious identification rather than de facto shared space. While initially the issue first mentioned was the difficulty of church building in Muslim countries, the narrative quickly transformed and became about guarding the boundaries of ‘our’ space to which the Muslim groups did not belong despite their long-standing presence in the locality.

Not disregarding the valuable connection the participants felt with Christians in other countries, it was the lack of connection to their fellow neighbours, and particularly lack of trust towards the minority groups that the participants expressed, that is a troubling finding as it points to a lack of political friendships between some of the Catholics and the Muslims in Warsaw. As Danielle Allen argued, it is when majority groups distrust minority groups that the possibility of one group being expelled is born (Allen 2006). Allen argues that evidencing willingness to make sacrifices ‘even for the strangers’ is a powerful tool for generating trust (Allen 2006: 157).

This section demonstrated that apart from secularist opposition, many participants underpinned their anti-Muslim and Islamophobic sentiments in their religious (Catholic) identity. Their arguments partly reflected a concern over a weakening of Catholicism and, inseparable to this - Polishness. Opposition was also motivated by global concerns with participants justifying their opposition to what they saw as ongoing discrimination of Christians in Muslim majority countries. These findings suggest an active demobilisation of political friendships with participants’ varying knowledge of global inter-religious conflicts justifying opposition to Muslims in Warsaw even if for many, knowledge of Muslim countries and the ongoing events in other geographical localities were based on little more than selective media reporting.

SPACES OF TENSION, SPACES OF HOPE?

This last section of the chapter and final part of the mosque case study moves beyond mapping the opposition to the mosque construction, Muslims and Islam by discussing the possibilities of the emergence of more hopeful narratives that can challenge antagonistic tensions and facilitate agonistic politics and political friendships.

SPACES OF TENSION

This chapter has shown that in the tension between the secularist group and the Muslim participants, despite attempts at dialogue, little space for overlap or understanding was found. The anti-mosque group's position echoed the classical secularisation theory. The original Habermasian (1991) understanding of the public sphere encompasses an idealisation of the public sphere as void of religion and promoting of liberal values (Calhoun 2011). Critics of Habermas challenge the 'uncontested hegemony of liberalism' (Mouffe 2005: 10). Habermas' thesis has in recent scholarship on religion and secularism been argued to be limiting and in need of re-thinking, even by Habermas himself (Habermas 2006, Calhoun, Juergensmeyer and Antwerpen 2011).

The secularist position only allowed religion in the public sphere 'for the purpose of addressing "the moral conscience" of its audience' demanding for it to 'leave its coercive powers outside the door' (Asad 2003: 186). Since for Muslims this was not enough secularist encounters with Muslims in the Warsaw public sphere can be interpreted as having made little space for political friendships between the conflicted groups and instead facilitated antagonisms (Mouffe 2005, Allen 2006).

The encounters between secularists and Muslims took place as a We/They confrontation on an uneven platform where one group, Muslims, were expected to reform to be allowed to be part of a public sphere. As Danielle Allen (2006) has argued, the secularist approaches to the incorporation of Islam into the public sphere through reform and monitoring, exemplified instances of failure of the creation of political friendships based on trust, mutual sacrifice and compromise. This left little room for more hopeful or overlapping politics. Taylor (1999) and Asad (2003) both get to the core of what is needed for more just spaces to have the chance to emerge:

The secularism of the overlapping consensus will thus be susceptible to conflicts of a new kind... it will be hard to manage. It will require a change of our mindset, away from the highly charged moralism which will only settle for the single right answer generated from unchallenged foundational principles – a mindset which has been all too common among liberals nourished on a post-Enlightenment independent ethic. (Taylor 1999: 52-53)

If the performance of free speech is dependent on free listening, its effectiveness depends on the kind of listener who can engage appropriately with what is said, as well as the time and space he or she has to live in. (Asad 2003: 185)

Habermas in recent years has recognised the paradox in the liberal idea that while people are free to determine their religious practice and identity, the public sphere is ‘shielded from religious influences’ (Habermas 2011:23-24). Habermas further claims that citizens are expected to:

‘participate in a democratic process whose results must be kept free of any religious “contamination”. Laicism pretends to resolve this paradox by privatising religion entirely.’ (Habermas 2011: 24)

Paul Cloke and Justin Beaumont (2013) have adapted these new Habermasian views into the field of geography, ideas they have termed as postsecular geographies. The authors claim that post-secularism aims to be a critique of secularism’s more oppressive side aiming to release ‘the hushed-up voice of religion’ back into the public sphere (Cloke and Beaumont 2013: 27). As such it potentially provides an answer to Sardar’s (2006) critique of a lack of space for difference to exist as difference rather than being reformed to fit into the dominant secular narrative.

Cloke has argued for the importance of faith in shaping ‘our’ ethical registers (Cloke 2012). He also presents more ambitious arguments for what he suggests to be the rightful place of religion in the public sphere when he talks of breaking down religious fundamentalism and creating spaces of care, protest and hope (Cloke 2012). It is this latter understanding of postsecularism that, I argue, can facilitate political friendships in the public sphere as it allows thinking in broader terms about religion’s public role beyond a moralising or magical role that primarily serves the secular hegemony.

Critiquing the unwillingness of geography to engage with religion, Cloke encourages the ‘more progressive’ parts of religions to be let into the public sphere

arguing that people from outside religion have much to learn from the religious. However, Cloke and Beaumont's post-secularism follows the Habermasian idea of translation. Despite the fact that Habermas has recently challenged his own views on a religion-free public sphere, he nevertheless insists on the act of translation of religious language to be understood by all groups in the public sphere. He argues for the 'unleashing [of] religious voices in the political public sphere' (Habermas 2006: 10) understanding religion's role as having 'special power to articulate moral intuitions'. While Habermas encourages religious presence beyond the confinement of the private sphere, his inclusiveness towards faith in the public sphere is underpinned by an argument that fails to challenge secular hegemony, seeing religion as limited to theology that merely adds moral exotification:

It must not discourage religious persons and communities from also expressing themselves politically as such, for it cannot know whether secular society would not otherwise cut itself off from key resources for the creation of meaning and identity (Habermas 2006: 10).

As such Cloke (2012), like Habermas (2006), justifies the entry of religion into the public sphere based on what religion can bring to enrich the dominant secular public sphere. The problem with this view is that it is the religious language that needs to be translated because, as argued by Charles Taylor, non-religious discourse in the public sphere functions as the 'ideological Esperanto' (Charles Taylor 2011a: 58).

Post-secular theory as outlined by Cloke and Beaumont (2013) is limited by its heavy influence from Habermas who has not divorced his thinking from the overarching idea of universality and consensus that legitimates discourses of reform to religious language. With this in mind, I argue that the recent theoretical ventures into inter-religious spaces of hope need to be rooted in a radical post-secularism that truly challenges oppressive secularism, opening the public sphere to the possibility of non-secular spaces.

SPACES OF HOPE

While there has been research that suggests Islamophobic attitudes are mobilised by Christians in the West (Dunn & Kamp 2009, Allevi 2009, Cesari 2005, Saint-Blancat, and Friedberg 2005 Triandafyllidou & Gropas 2009) there is little if any research on the emergence of more positive and counter-Islamophobic relations in non-secular spaces. Inter-religious understanding between Muslims and Catholics

was a recurring theme in my case study. This was evident even among participants like Adriana who was initially negative to the mosque construction in Warsaw. Talking about Islam as a ‘nice’ and ‘beautiful’ religion she was able to engage positively with Islam on a religious level. In doing so Adriana divorced the popular image of Muslims as violent and oppressive from Islam as a religion:

I once started to read the Quran, but never finished. But I know the main rules and in there, there are things about respect to humans, to life, respect to others and other faiths... generally it is really nice. But it depends how it is read. So the way people understand it is the way they will act. So it is not the issue of Islam in general, because Islam has got so many branches. So it depends on the way someone reads this beautiful book [Quran]... if it is truly a pure Islam then it is really a very beautiful religion, one that does not harm anyone. Christianity is also this kind of religion, we are not trying to harm anyone.

(Adriana, paired interview)

This sympathetic sentiment was also echoed by other Catholic participants:

Unfortunately it is the case with Islam that the first association is very media-influenced. That there are two towers (laughs) that planes are crashing into. I am only laughing because I am myself fighting with this. And... I am trying to remember where [Islam] comes from, when and how it began and that it is the same foundation as Judaism, the same foundation as Christianity. And we do say that Judaism... we say they are our older brothers in faith. Yes... yes... it is the same. And a lot of... the core ideas are the same... they are similar.

(Michalina, focus group)

The role of the Polish Pope⁵⁴ was central in fuelling inter-religious curiosity and understanding. An opponent of secularism and proponent of a European re-evangelisation, the Polish Pope promoted a Europe that was Christian but not a Europe that was religiously exclusive (Mavelli 2008). Referencing Catholic liturgy, Eugeniusz Sakowicz (2011) argues that the Declaration of the Relation of the Church to non-Christian religions proclaimed during the Second Vatican Council had a substantial impact on inter-religious dialogue between Catholics and Muslims:

The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems [sic!]. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself... Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honour Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with

⁵⁴ The former Polish Pope, John Paul II, remains to be an important influence of Poles being strongly influenced by his teachings (CBOS 2010)

devotion... Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

(Nostra Aetate, Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions, proclaimed by His Holiness Pope Paul IV on 28 October 1965)

Despite the selective adherence to Catholic teachings among Polish people in general, the former Pope enjoys continuing popularity and is still regarded as an authority in Poland⁵⁵ (CBOS 2010).

Let the mosque be there... Also thinking about some of the authorities such as the Pope, he always strived towards unity right? So he always found what was common, what unites us, so as to not be negatively positioned.

(Teresa, focus group)

The inter-faith understanding was evidenced during interviews with Muslims, too. Among the Muslim participants, many indicated that they liked living in a Catholic country because of the understanding they experienced from many Poles who identified with a religious tradition.

I really feel that, we as Muslims here... even though Poland is a religious country, it is still easier for us to keep our faith and culture here. And Catholicism is not imposed on us. But secularism of the state, on the other hand, is imposed from the top. So it is surely better to live in a religious country where the religion is different but monotheistic than to live in a secular country... that is for sure... 100%.

(Oliwia, focus group, Muslim women)

When it comes to [Catholic] religion in itself and [Catholic] religious symbols, then for me it is not a problem. So to me it is a bigger problem for Muslims in a country like... even like Holland. There they have secular trends, they are even strictly atheist and against immigration and all the 'evil' that comes from the outside and these sentiments are very, very strong. And there... Muslims... I got some friends on the Internet who tells me how life is over there... so if someone comes to Poland, a country where there are very few Muslims, they will see that it is easier for them to walk in the streets. Here there is still curiosity, sometimes something unpleasant happens but it is not comparable with that aggression towards the idea and the ideology.

(Lena, individual interview)

⁵⁵ In a study on norms and values 73% of respondents indicated that the late Polish Pope has a 'large influence' on their views and values about the world and life. This is a decrease from 2005 when 80% of respondents answered similarly (CBOS 2010)

Many Muslims in Warsaw participated in various inter-faith initiatives aimed at bringing the communities together. One such prominent event that Muslims felt particularly positive towards was the Day of Islam, organised by the Catholic Church in cities across Poland. The annual event stressed the inter-religious bond between Christianity and Islam that has grown out of a historical presence of Islam in Poland and the peaceful cohabitation of Muslims and Catholics (RWKM 1998). As such, the Day of Islam is an example of the kind of collaboration and understanding that can be nurtured through mutual conversation between people who are different to one another (Kong 2010, Allen 2006). During the year of my fieldwork in Warsaw (2011-2012) the theme for the Day of Islam event was around the resistance to secularism and pushing religion into the public sphere. The Apostolic Nuncio to Poland wrote of the day:

‘The theme of your gathering underlies the spiritual dimension of the human person and is of the first rank importance in our days when religious values and the role of religion in the public sphere are questioned’.

A similar theme was echoed during other inter-faith events, such as the end of Ramadan when the message from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue emphasised the primary concern for Christians and Muslims to take on ‘the challenges of materialism and secularisation’.

The Muslim attendees saw the Day of Islam as an opportunity to connect with people within and across their faith. The event incorporated Catholic and Muslim prayers with speeches from clerics and academics. It also involved positive, sometimes humorous, exchanges between the Catholics and Muslims as described in one of my participant observations:

To mark the attendance of both groups, Catholics and Muslims had different signing-in sheets at the entrance to the Church. Aisha, wearing her hijab, was the first one of our group that went up to the register to sign in to the event. The man at the desk looked at her and asked: ‘Are you Muslim?’ Amused, Aisha turned to face her friends and said animatedly ‘No I am just dressing up as one today ha ha ha’.

(Participant observation, Day of Islam, January 2012)

Marian, a Polish Muslim man, was involved in the Council of Muslims and Catholics that organises various inter-faith activities. Marian echoed the conciliatory sentiment of other Muslim participants by talking of a ‘true spirituality’:

I think that truly religious people should understand other truly religious people. So if Poles are dedicated to their religion in some kind of a truly spiritual way, then they should be sympathetic to others. Because a person that has got a faith, and is truly devoted to their faith will understand others. A superficial understanding of faith results in a superficial way in which people treat other religions.

(Marian, individual interview)

This brings back the possibility of the mobilisation of narratives evidenced in the ‘open Catholicism’ attitudes demonstrated by some of the Catholic supporters but also opponents of the mosque:

In all conflicts, debates, the thing is that it is easier to break down possible reluctance, from both sides, with people who are religious. In this particular dialogue, you can look closer at the conversation with people who were, let’s say, critical of Islam but were linked or felt close to some religious tradition... it was much easier to find a common ground... However with people in the rationalist group I have got the impression that it is incredibly difficult to find a platform of shared reference.

(Marek, individual interview)

Despite being raised in a non-religious family, Marek’s experiences of talking with the secularist critics of Islam convinced him that it was difficult to find a platform for dialogue. He contrasted this to his experiences of dialogue with Catholics:

For example they [Catholics] understand that religious convictions might entail practices that might seem weird to some people. I don’t know, Catholics in Poland still have got an understanding for fasting, right, or they understand that it is only men that are priests right? Regardless of how you might judge that, they understand that these things are present also in other religious traditions. And here there is always the possibility to refer to, especially with Christians, to a shared Abrahamic tradition.

(Marek, individual interview)

Inter-religious understanding between faith groups is not a theme often found in the dominant academic narratives. The few notable examples often confine the potential for non-secular spaces with a focus too heavily dependent on theories of post-

secularism (Cloke 2012, Cloke and Beaumont 2013). I have argued that while post-secularism is welcomed in the way that it challenges some of the more oppressive versions of secular theory, it does not go as far as it could in challenging the liberal secular hegemony observed in the West.

The evidence presented in this section has shown that when participants were able to engage with Islam on a spiritual level through the Quran, the Pope, or through their own understanding of religious needs and sentiments, they saw beyond the popular negative narratives of Muslims and Islam – narratives that they themselves had often earlier employed. This demonstrates the difference in the way that the secularists treated Islam (as inherently irrational and oppressive) as compared to how Islam was understood by those who also operated in non-secular spaces.

The data have shown how religion can be rallied to further a common understanding and contribute to the continuation of the ecumenical preaching of the Polish Pope and the inclusiveness of the ‘Open Catholicism’ movement. It explores a potential ‘space of hope’ that emerged in my study. This space was created mainly between the groups that identified as being Muslim and those that identified as being Catholic with the hopeful element of their narratives based on inter-religious understanding, curiosity and mutual respect. This section discussed these spaces of understanding and their role in nurturing emerging possibilities that may be deployed to challenge the Islamophobic narratives identified in this study.

CONCLUSION

Secular and religious narratives against the mosques and more broadly, against Islam’s presence in the public sphere, were mapped and challenged in this chapter. It started by focussing on the conflict between the secularist and Muslim perceptions of the relationship between religion and the public sphere. For Muslims participants’, leaving their religion at the door step of the public sphere was not seen as a viable option. For the secularists, drawing on the secular liberal ideas of the Habermasian public sphere, only an Islam that functioned solely in the private sphere was tolerable as a religion, though fundamentally devoid of rationality. Yet as soon as it went beyond the private sphere it became public and consequently ‘dangerous to Europe’. Furthermore, according to the secularists Islam needed

reform and was not going to be deemed acceptable by the secularist group until it publicly renounced parts of the Quran that the secularists found to be objectionable.

As will be discussed more in the second case study of this thesis, Catholic participants did not take kindly to the attempts at curbing public expressions of religion in the Polish public sphere. And neither did the Polish Muslims. Interviews with the Muslim participants interrupted the secularist narrative by arguing that, to them, religion is not private. In fact this unique more fluid Polish conceptualisation of the public sphere was gladly acknowledged and appreciated by the Muslim group.

The example of the Muhammad cartoons demonstrated that the liberal secularists did not regard caricature and offensive imagery of Muslim people on their web pages as Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism because they did not consider Muslims to be subjects of racialisation. To them, satirising Muslims on their Facebook page was central to the exercise of freedom of expression. These were familiar secular liberal discourses often employed in Western European countries. However, such narratives sit uncomfortably within a Polish context where blasphemy cases are not uncommon.

The Polish Catholic participants employed narratives rooted in their religious identity. While some used this identity to motivate their opposition towards mosque building, both supporters and opponents of the mosque nuanced their narratives when given the opportunity to reflect on their Catholicism and the messages proclaimed by Catholic authorities such as Pope John Paul II and Jozef Tischner. This opened up fragile possibilities for spaces of inter-religious understanding to emerge.

ABORTION CASE STUDY

The second case study looks at the long running tensions around the issue of abortion and investigates how these tensions play out in the Polish public sphere. Abortion is the primary battlefield through which wider sexual politics are fought out in the Polish public sphere. On one side of the conflict are pro-choice groups, predominantly those engaged with the feminist movement and on the other side the pro-life groups predominantly reflecting a dominant Catholic agenda. This case study opens with an introductory section that historically situates the context of the conflict. The three main chapters of the case study then draw on this history in telling the story of how these tensions developed in the public sphere during my fieldwork in Warsaw (2011-2012).

SITUATING THE CONTEXT

The second case study in this thesis focuses on abortion politics. Located at the intersection of tensions around sexual politics, religion and secularism, abortion has become an increasingly antagonistic conflict. With abortion at the forefront, sexual politics represent deeply engrained tensions between imagined geographies of Polishness and Europeanness, religion and secularism, feminism and ideal womanhood. These categories, as complex and entangled as they are, have been evolving in the Polish public sphere since the end of Communist rule.

Sexual politics have been the unruly companion of significant shifts in the political and social make-up of the country from de-Stalinisation to the democratic transition and the enlargement of the European Union. This chapter traces abortion through this history highlighting selected key events. Crucial moments such as the introduction of legal abortion in 1956, the fall of the Communist system and subsequent democratic transition in 1989, the criminalisation of abortion in 1993 and the Eastern expansion of the European Union in 2004 will be described. In light of my empirical work in Poland, interpreted through feminist literature on abortion conflict (Graff 2003; Chelstowska 2008; Chelstowska 2011; Fuszara 1993), I interpret these dates as emblematic of the current conflict between sexual politics and religious politics – a conflict where abortion functions as the battlefield.

Abortion in Poland is a criminal offence only legal in specific exceptional circumstances⁵⁶. The current legislation regarding termination of pregnancy is only two decades old, swiftly enacted as part of the democratisation processes that began in 1989. Sexual politics became one of the first issues debated in the new democracy, with the debate broadly engaging with issues covering the role of the Church in society as well as key aspects of health care and social policy (Fuszara 1993; Titkow 1993; Hauser, Heyns, and Mansbridge 1993; Saxonberg and Szelewa 2007). However, the material and symbolic importance of the contested 1993

⁵⁶ Poland has one of the most stringent anti-abortion laws in Europe. Abortion in Poland is permitted in the following circumstances (Czerwinski 2003)

1. If the pregnancy constitutes a treat to a women's life or health
2. If tests reveal that the foetus is irreversibly handicapped or
3. If the pregnancy was a result of a forbidden act (rape, incest)

abortion bill to the construction of a Polish political imagination is rarely observed outside of feminist scholarship (Fuszara 1993, Gal & Kigman).

The last two decades have witnessed the birth of both pro-choice and pro-life groups in Poland which have provided some structure to the abortion conflict in the public sphere (Fuszara 1993). While superficially the conflict can be seen solely in terms of the frictions between these two groups, deeper investigation reveals the complex entanglements between the politics of sexuality and the politics of religion at play in the subtext of the Polish national debate (Vieten 2013). In the context of a country that largely perceives itself as being built around the crucial figure of a woman as a mother, central to the reproduction of the fatherland, it is unsurprising that sexual politics are deeply entwined in the conflicting ways in which the national political community is imagined (Janion 2006).

INTERWAR PERIOD: FEMINIST MOBILISATIONS FOR ABORTION RIGHTS

Debates around the legalisation of abortion formed part of the wider debate regarding the formation of a Polish criminal code in the 1920s (Grzywacz 2013). The gynaecologist, poet and playwright Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński⁵⁷ and feminist and writer Irena Krzywicka⁵⁸ campaigned against ‘back-alley abortions’ and their associated health complications (Grzywacz 2013). Popular support for the legalisation of abortion grew in the country and was eventually signed into law after the death of Stalin. Maria Jaszczuk, then parliamentarian and rapporteur for the Bill on Conditions of Pregnancy Termination in which abortion was made legal for Polish women in 1956, recounts:

‘[There were] women’s activists in Warsaw and in consultation with the Health Minister we started to prepare the abortion bill. I only received one letter in opposition to my proposal to introduce legal abortion (a letter with a religious picture asking why I was doing it). But other than that it [legal abortion] was met with approval’ (Jaszczuk 2009, *own translation*)

⁵⁷ Boy-Żeleński was a proponent of women’s rights and one of the first and most vocal supporters of legal abortion.

⁵⁸ Irena Krzywicka was the most famous Polish feminist of the pre-war and inter-war periods, propagating sexual education and access to abortion.

COMMUNIST PERIOD: GENDER EQUALITY ON PAPER AND ABORTION ON DEMAND

Socialist ideology, even though primarily focussed on class rather than gender, initially looked promising for Polish women and their position in society, promising to ‘automatically free women from the chains of patriarchy’ (Wolanik Bostrom 2005: 123). The official agenda of the Communist regime promoted gender equality. Free childcare was provided by the state, and with men’s monthly salaries insufficient to support a family, many women entered the labour market (Titkow 2004). Legal abortion was widely available in Poland and was utilised by both Polish women and women from other European countries such as Sweden where abortion was not legal at the time. As one pro-choice activist reflected in a pro-choice film (2009):

My generation got the right in 1956 to enjoy the rights to decide about themselves. And we still had more children than women have today!
(Podziemne Panstwo Kobiet)

Even under Communism, when women’s education and employment levels increased significantly, women were still overwhelmingly responsible for the home and family (Einhorn 1995; Łobodzińska 1995). Despite public discourse being officially pro-women, women earned less and enjoyed less authority than men in the workforce (Hauser, Heyns, and Mansbridge 1993). Dealing with the double, or even multiple, burden of both full time work in the public sphere as well as in the private sphere (Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk 2000) women’s role in managing their households was yet more challenging in the context of shortages of goods and services (Heinen and Portet 2010). Women were encouraged to return to work as soon as possible after giving birth leaving state sponsored nurseries and kindergartens overfull and stretched (Saxonberg and Szelewa 2007).

After the fall of the Communist system in 1989, Central-European governments took measures towards the “re-familisation” of their societies. Cutting government expenditure of nursery schools and kindergartens, they turned to support women in their roles as mothers rather than workers. Such policies made it hard for women to remain in the labour market (Saxonberg and Sirovatka 2006). Siklova (1993) argues that some Western feminists saw the fall of Communism as a big loss for women, who previously participated in the workforce alongside men and who after the fall

of Communism were hushed back into the private sphere. However for many women on the ground the pressure to work outside of the home was considered more of an imposed condition on women rather than their liberation. In resistance to this imposition many women found it important to protect what they understood as a traditional way of life by re-emphasising traditional gender roles (Nanette Funk and Mueller 1993; Muller and Skovajsa 2010). Not least because this too was seen as a form of symbolic opposition to the Communist regime.

1989 AND THE FORMATION OF A DEMOCRATIC PUBLIC SPHERE

With the collapse of the Communist system, in Poland as well as in other parts of Central and Eastern Europe such as in Hungary, East Germany, Serbia, Slovenia and Croatia, more restrictive abortion laws were proposed (S Gal and Klingman 2000). This gave rise to a prominent women's movement in Poland (S Gal and Klingman 2000; Chełstowska 2008). Women's groups directed their protests towards the Catholic Church when they took to the streets chanting: '*This is Poland, not the Vatican!*', '*Fewer churches, more day care*', '*God saves us from the Church!*' and '*Poland was enslaved, Polish women will be enslaved*' (Hauser, Heyns, and Mansbridge 1993: 259). One of my participants, Basia, was on the streets at this time. She remembers the days when the newly democratised public sphere filled with women's activists. I interviewed her in the small offices of Poland's only pro-choice organisation, where she continued to radiate an activist spirit. She recalled the time when Polish women took to the streets:

From 1980s until 1989 I basically was busy raising children, working at the university and other things more to do with entertainment, but not so much politics. But there was this moment, when I went to do the grocery shopping and saw a note saying 'if you disagree with the project put to the Parliament about criminalising abortion and also a two year punishment for a person that helped a women end her pregnancy meet at the Copernicus monument'... well then I dropped everything, left the kids with an uncooked meal (laughs) and went to the Copernicus monument. The protest in May under the Copernicus monument is like a milestone in my activities. I left my previous roles and... in 1989... across Poland there were a myriad of organisations and movements being set up. We set up [name of Basia's pro-choice group] in June that year.

(Basia, individual interview, pro-choice)

This was in 1989, when plans to change the abortion legislation were proposed, leading to the formation of around 30 women's groups (Einhorn and Sever 2001). Sexual politics were among the first issues raised in the new post-Communist democracies⁵⁹. Consequently, conflict around abortion must be studied in the context of the formation of a democratic public sphere. The criminalisation of abortion proposed by right-wing and religious groups came as a shock to many women like Basia (S Gal and Klingman 2000). Although the bill eventually went through, it was not representative of the overwhelmingly pro-choice public opinion. In the beginning of the 1990s according to a survey conducted by the Polish Statistical Bureau, 75% of respondents supported legal abortion. Since then, public opinion has gradually become more pro-life, with a marked shift in 2006 when the majority public opinion was recorded to be pro-life (Chelstowska 2011). This change in position can be traced to the campaigning of the Church and the sympathy of the Polish media with its position (Chelstowska 2011).

SOLIDARNOŚĆ AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

With the Polish Pope John Paul II at its helm the Church played a central role in the struggle for democratic rule in Poland. The victory of the Solidarność opposition movement over the Communist regime and the subsequent debate over sexual politics in the public sphere can be traced to the influence of the Catholic Church (Chelstowska 2011). Solidarność had close ties to the Catholic Church throughout their struggle in opposition (Chelstowska 2011). The victory of Solidarność was therefore also a victory for the Church. The Church's involvement in the transition from Communism to democracy was not regarded as a 'meddling' into politics (Kozłowska 2013). Rather the Church's active role in the shaping of Poland's new political agenda was understood as a continuation of its role in opposition to Communism (Chelstowska 2008). Yet after 1989 the Church's rhetoric moved from insistence on human rights, freedom and democracy to insistence on the human rights of the 'unborn child' (Graff 2003). The use of such language reflects broader abortion politics in countries such as the USA and the UK (Jackson and Valentine 2014a), two contexts that have inspired the Polish pro-life movement (explored in chapter 9).

⁵⁹ Sexual politics were also debated in new democracies in other Central and Eastern European countries (S Gal and Klingman 2000)

At the time of the democratic transition the abortion conflict was an important symbolic issue signalling the changing morality of Polish society and its relationship with the Church. A ban on abortion meant more than merely a criminalisation of the termination of pregnancies. Abortion became the symbol of changing values in a newly democratised Poland, a country that was reshaping its national identity (A. M. C. Kramer 2003). The post 1989 abortion debate and legislative changes to the abortion bill marked a distancing of Poland from its Communist past while simultaneously reaffirming its links to the Catholic Church. The changing abortion bill was seen as a test, exposing the loyalties of politicians as either being in favour of Communist values or in alliance with the Church (S Gal and Klingman 2000). This change in emphasis on sexual politics by the Church created divisions among groups previously united in the opposition movement (S Gal and Klingman 2000). Solidarność, a male-dominated trade union, predictably promoted a traditional family structure with traditional gender roles (Wałęsa 2011). However the involvement of women in the movement was of importance (Penn 2006). While the patriarchs of Solidarność pushed for the criminalisation of abortion in the early 1990s (Einhorn and Sever 2001), the women's committee⁶⁰ opposed the new abortion bill and subsequently, this women's committee was dissolved in 1991 (Penn 2006).

THE EU AND THE RELIGIOUS COMPROMISE

The last decade has witnessed Polish accession to the European Union (2004). With this has come mounting pressure to adopt Western European secular values with the abortion debate again being used as a litmus test, the symbolic proxy for the wider values of Polish society. For pro-choice participants EU accession is described with bittersweet sentiments; opening up possibilities for gender mainstreaming programmes yet contributing to an NGO-isation and professionalisation of many grassroots women's groups (Czerwińska and Piotrkowska 2009). This was also a key event for the politics of religion and secularism. The Church hoped that the accession of Catholic Poland into a Western Europe 'poisoned' by secularism would catalyse a re-evangelisation of the European community (Mavelli 2008). Again,

⁶⁰ This point deserves to be nuanced on the basis of the limited literature available on the role of women within the Solidarność (Solidarity movement). The most prominent account is delivered by Shana Penn (Penn 2006) who writes about the gradual exclusion of women from the corridors of newly gained power by the opposition movement.

abortion became a central lever in the negotiations between supporters of EU accession and the Church, not dissimilar to the role that sexual politics played in the negotiations between Solidarność and the Church after 1989. In order to gain the crucial support of the Episcopate for Poland's EU accession, the debate around abortion had to be silenced. As Agnieszka Graff (2003:111) recalls 'Everyone knew that there was a silent pact concerning EU accession and abortion, a "compromise" between the post-Communists and the Church at the expense of women'. Similar to the earlier key moments in the history of tensions around abortion and religion, the Polish women's movement, having scattered, organised themselves. One of the outcomes was the Letter of 100 Women (Janion et al. 2002)⁶¹. The letter, a protest against the compromise of women's rights to abortion, called for the European Parliament to initiate a debate on reproductive rights in Poland (Graff 2003). The letter exposed a complicated triangular relationship between the Church, the EU and Polish politicians. The letter read:

A peculiar agreement has been reached by the Catholic Church and the government concerning Poland's admission into the European Union. Namely, the Church will support integration with Europe in return for the government's closing the debate on the revision of the anti-abortion law....[W]omen's rights are bought and sold behind the scenes of Poland's integration with the European Union (Janion et al. 2002).

Participants in my study often mentioned the EU accession as a moment where their rights were 'sold off' (interview with Iga and Gizela). With the EU accession, a period of anticipation in the imaginary waiting room to Europe's borders was over for Poland (see Chakrabarty 2000). Yet for the pro-choice and pro-life groups, who since 1993 had been dissatisfied with an alleged abortion compromise, the EU accession was seen as, at best, problematic. In summary, the abortion conflict in Poland has run in parallel to important political changes in Poland which have been crucial to the formation of a Polish public sphere and a (re)imagination of a Polish post-Communist reality. As a consequence of these changes, Poland's national identity has become tightly linked with sexual politics and the control of reproduction (explored in chapter 8). After all, Polish women have historically been assumed to reproduce the nation and its national identity, a task that not all parties in the conflict are in favour of (Janion 2006). The following three chapters navigate

⁶¹ Amongst the women who signed the letter were poet and Nobel Prize winner Wislawa Szymborska and film director Agnieszka Holland.

through this historical and political context in more detail and in so doing map out the current abortion conflict.

CHAPTER 7.

PRECARIOUS PRESENCE: ABORTION POLITICS & SPATIAL CONTESTATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of abortion politics in the Polish public sphere are shaped by the spatial juxtaposition of the opposing groups. This chapter maps the significant spatial transformation of abortion politics in the Warsaw public sphere. In contrast to the mass mobilisation in the early 1990s, contemporary feminist and pro-choice groups have vacated the streets and moved their activism into semi-public and virtual spaces. In the meantime pro-life groups, drawing inspiration from the global pro-life movement, have increasingly claimed the public sphere as a space for aggressive campaigning (Jackson and Valentine 2014b). The occupation of the public sphere by the male-dominated pro-life movement and a withdrawal from it of the female-dominated pro-choice movement reflects a gendered division of the public sphere (Fraser 1995). The online presence of the groups suggests possibilities for the creation of counter-narratives and autonomous geographies (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006). But what do these changes mean for a broader democratic public sphere? (see Jackson and Valentine 2014). I will discuss these ideas by linking literature on the public sphere (Habermas 1991) and its critiques (Fraser 1990, Calhoun 2010, Benhabib, 1992, Young, 2000) with recent work on new (virtual) geographies (Pickerill 2006; Pickerill 2007; Jazeel 2010; Bernal 2005; Tsaliki 2002; Papacharissi 2002) particularly in the context of abortion (Jackson and Valentine 2014e). I look to feminist work aimed at unhinging and troubling the gendered public sphere to flesh out the idea that abortion politics disrupt the neat public-private dichotomy (Jeffreys 2011; Valentine 1993; Valentine 1989; Namaste 1996; Koskela 1997). This chapter is structured around three main sections; the first *Shifting Visibility* maps the spatial transformation of the public sphere. The second section *Gendered Divisions of Space* discusses the gendered impact of the shift. The final section, *From Street to Facebook* critically examines the rise of virtual spaces for abortion politics in Poland and the impact of this trend on the broader sexual politics of the Polish public sphere.

SHIFTING VISIBILITY

Abortion was freely available in Poland during Communist rule and was gradually retired from the public to the private sphere as the country democratised (Fuszara 1993). This change was reflected in the relative prominence of pro-life and pro-choice groups in the Polish public sphere.

Everyone was talking feverishly to one another saying “it is impossible, improbable! ... It was a nationwide movement, active on all levels, from the grassroots up.

(Basia, individual interview, pro-choice)

The criminalisation of abortion that came into force in 1993 seemed impossible or at the very least highly improbable in 1989. As discussed in the introduction to this case study, groups protesting against the criminalisation of abortion played a key role in the formation of a democratic public sphere in Poland during the transition from Communist rule (Fuszara 1993). This led to thousands of people – women and men – taking to the streets in the summer of 1989 (Fuszara 1993, Gal & Kligman 2000). Basia recounts this period as a time of mass public protest:

This was 1989... across Poland there was a myriad of organisations and movements being set up... and in the case of my organisation it really was a grassroots initiative. We were one of the first organisations that used the law given to us regarding free associations.

(Basia, individual interview, pro-choice)

According to Wanda Nowicka⁶², the activities in the public sphere during the 1990s can be considered a huge civil movement in the new democracy where Poles mobilised in a struggle against the Church’s involvement in sexual politics and a fight for what she calls real democracy (Nowicka 1997). This period in recent Polish history saw the beginnings of both pro-choice activism and of democratic grassroots politics more widely in Poland (Podziemne Państwo Kobiet 2009). Many of the people active today in the pro-choice feminist movement started their activism during this period often as part of grassroots movements linked to left-wing or even anarchist groups. Jagoda and Aneta are two feminists that started their pro-choice activism within the punk-rock scene:

⁶² Nowicka is one of Poland’s most dedicated pro-choice activists and recently elected politician with the Palikot Movement/Your Movement party

It was in the beginning of 2000 or even end of 1990s, in 1998 and 1999... it was through punk-rock and *Feminoteka* where I have been working for the past six years.

(Jagoda, paired interview, pro-choice)

I was part of *Emancypunk* for a while, with *AFE*⁶³ for a bit and these were all groups where these issues were discussed continuously until it got tiresome, but on the other hand they needed to be discussed *ad nauseam* because nothing was changing. So mainly it was street actions, information actions, performances and things like that, leaflets too... (pause). So that would be it. And later I came across *Porozumienie Kobiet 8 Marca* [Women's 8th March Agreement] and also the group *Same o Sobie* [Self Narrated]⁶⁴ and whenever there were some events organised then I took part in them.

(Aneta, paired interview, pro-choice)

Both Jagoda and Aneta remember using public spaces for their pro-choice and/or feminist activism:

I remember we took part in a pro-life demonstration and dressed as old ladies and walked with our rosary beads but were giving out completely different leaflets to passers-by!

(Jagoda, paired interview, pro-choice)

Meanwhile, pro-life groups in the early post-Communist years were largely invisible in the public sphere despite the fact that the pro-life discourse headed by the Church and the Solidarity movement was highly influential in the early days of Polish democracy and indeed dictated the narrative in the corridors of power (Dzierżawski 2012). Since this time a drastic shift has taken place in the ways in which the public sphere has been claimed by the opposing groups:

The situation started changing in the end of 1980s and beginning of the 1990s when the film *Silent Scream* was heavily promoted. It showed what abortion *really* was.

(Aldona, focus group, pro-life, *my emphasis*)

I think that supporting legal abortion in Poland is today a bigger taboo than before. People do not speak about this in public... as officially the topic has not existed for the last 15 or 20 years. The issue of abortion has been pushed under the carpet to the extent that we have gotten used to treating it as something abstract.

(Amelia, individual interview, pro-choice)

⁶³ Anarchist feminist groups.

⁶⁴ Pro-choice initiative.

The last two decades have witnessed the birth of what pro-choice Basia referred to as the ‘generation of The Silent Scream’⁶⁵, changing the abortion discourse and causing a forceful move of abortion politics back into the private sphere (Graff 2003). While terminations of pregnancy were a common procedure during Communism, unwanted pregnancy has become shameful in post-Communist Poland (Graff 2003). In contrast to the work of Longhurst on the Otherness of a visibly pregnant body there has been an emergence in Poland of the idea of the Otherness of a body that rejects a potential pregnancy (see Longhurst, 1996). The stigmatisation of abortion and consequently the stigmatisation of pro-abortion activism has flourished. Notably, the abortion debate in Poland has gone in exactly the opposite direction to the abortion debate in other European countries which have seen a gradual de-stigmatisation of abortion (Jackson and Valentine 2014a). A Dutch activist argues in the Polish pro-choice film that the sudden shift has created an atmosphere of fear in Poland:

‘I don’t know of any other country where [abortion] was legal and then became so illegal in one go. When it is made illegal it is suddenly embedded in an atmosphere of fear, of doing something wrong, of doing something against the law’ (Podziemne Państwo Kobiet 2009).

The growing stigma around abortion has also been reflected in the reduced public visibility of pro-choice groups. After a decade of illegal abortion in Poland, the idea of abortion in Poland has become “out of place”.

ENTERING THE PUBLIC: PRO-LIFE SPACES OF PROTEST

In contrast to the stable and continuous presence of the pro-choice movement in the public sphere throughout the 1990s, the pro-life movement as it is articulated today, was largely absent from the Polish public sphere during this period. The pro-life movement as an autonomous movement outside of the institution of the Church only became active in the mid-2000s and as such, had less bargaining power than and lagged behind the pro-choice movement that had been mobilising the masses on the Warsaw streets for a number of years (Dzierżawski 2012).

We were lacking power to influence. The opponents (pro-choice groups) were organised and we thought at first that we could copy their

⁶⁵ The Silent Scream is a 1984 US made anti-abortion film that popularised in pro-life campaigns and spread in Poland after the democratic transformations in the beginning of 1990s.

activism... So we wondered how we could equalise this unequal access to resources (Dzierżawski 2012).

Inspired by pro-life activism in the USA, pro-life groups changed their tactics.

The solution came from heaven, so to say... more concretely from a plane from the USA in 2004 where Greg Cunningham⁶⁶ came to visit us... Cunningham said that if we wanted to win the battle with abortion we should use successful methods, this means show horrible images... Cunningham also told us that the media likes scandal. If we bring about a situation of strong conflict then the media will be unable to write about this. Before the meeting I was sceptical of using negative tactics but since I saw what works and what doesn't then it made sense to adopt this tactic. And that is when we started doing the exhibitions. (Dzierżawski 2012)

With this change in tactics the pro-life groups started to claim the streets and cemented their presence in the public sphere. Their campaigns, inspired by groups in the USA, focused mainly on the use of graphic images, a tactic also utilised by the pro-life movement in other national settings, such as the UK (Jackson and Valentine 2014c). As Maxwell (2002) found in her study of the American pro-life movement, there was a shift observed in the utilisation of more radical and violent methods such as the use of imagery that has in the last decade become a prominent addition to the pro-life group's public presence (Jackson and Valentine 2014c). By exhibiting images of aborted fetuses in public as well as organising street demonstrations and silent vigils outdoors around these images, the pro-life movement in Poland aimed to awake emotions and influence public opinion. Jackson (2014b) warns that the utilisation of graphic images might not be a successful tactic in the long term because, following Pickerill (2006) and Brasted (2005) a reliance of spectacularisation of protest has the potential to become normalised. One of my first encounters with the main pro-life group in Poland was at a demonstration outside a Warsaw hospital that performed (legal) abortions⁶⁷:

⁶⁶ Greg Cunningham was the leader of the bioethics organisation CBR.

⁶⁷ The hospital allowed a woman to terminate her pregnancy legally on the grounds that the foetus was diagnosed with a Down's syndrome. The woman previously was rejected from another hospital for lacking legal grounds for abortion.



FIGURE D. 7.1 PRO-LIFE PROTEST OUTSIDE HOSPITAL, WARSAW
(copyright: Kasia Narkowicz 2012)

As I approached the hospital, I immediately saw the group that I was looking for, easily identified by the huge banner that they held up across the main pathway to the hospital. The banner pictured an image of a dead foetus covered in blood with the text 'In Hospital Bielański babies with Down's syndrome are killed'. Most passers-by were elderly women on their way to the hospital. When they were young abortion was legal. The demonstrators explained to me that typically passers-by look at the poster, sometimes stopping for a moment, and then continue without commenting or talking to the demonstrators. During my observation on only one occasion during the two hour long demonstration did someone stop and interact with the demonstrators. It was an older man who approached the demonstrators asking how often the group meets. He said he comes from another organisation (I assumed it was a religious one) and is a supporter of these kinds of actions.

(Participant observation January 2011)

Through my fieldwork, it became clear just how active pro-life groups were in material spaces. While interviewing a Catholic pro-life group, I asked if they were planning any events or actions in the near future. Everyone laughed and quickly picked up the various leaflets, schedules and notes off the big table we sat around to show me:

Oskar: We are starting a new campaign today (laughs)

Waldemar: You are getting first-hand information... in eight hours...

Oskar: ... we are starting an action!

Waldemar: We are starting a 40 day presence in the form of a prayer outside an in-vitro fertilisation clinic.

(Focus group, pro-life)

The group decided that they would stand outside the clinic at all times during the day for 40 days. The 40 Days for Life campaign coincided with Lent. As all legal abortions in Poland are performed in hospitals, the vigils took place at the doorstep of the hospitals. This type of religiously inspired activism where continuous vigils are held outside of hospitals or clinics is also a common tactic utilised by American pro-life groups (Maxwell 2002):

Kasia: Does that mean someone will be standing outside of the clinic at all times?

Waldemar: Yes we have already got people who have committed to it and more are signing up.

Wiktoria: We just did a rota. Here... (shows me a paper with times and names)

Waldemar: So we will fill the empty spaces that no one will take. During the hours when the clinic is open until the end of Lent... this will be on-going.

Kasia: And are you all going to attend this?

Kaja: We hope so.

Waldemar: There won't be any crowds, of course, but with 30 people involved in this action we have enough, with three one-hour shifts a week...

Kasia: And how many people will stand outside the clinic at the same time?

Waldemar: Our aim is for someone to be there at all times, at least one person. And that's a minimum. But we are also starting to campaign about it now, spread the message and we welcome you to join! It's a must!

(Focus group, pro-life)

Maxwell (2002) argues that one of the key motivations to join a pro-life movement, with their increasingly radicalised methods of activism, was the social aspect of the movement. Maxwell (2002) also found that early enthusiasm within pro-life groups eventually fades and participants need to find new ways to keep it going.

The lesser enthusiasm of the older pro-choice movement and the increasingly closed networks that they operated within - such as closed pro-choice planning meetings and private mailing lists - made it difficult to track down the activists and access the

groups. In this way the pro-choice feminist groups could be seen as being in the private rather than public sphere.

DEAD OR DEMOTIVATED: EXITING THE PUBLIC

At the time of my fieldwork, the pro-choice movement in Poland that entered the public sphere over two decades ago had become demotivated and, according to the oldest participant in my study, had ‘died out’:

There were about 70 of us active and then less and less, and now we are only a handful of people. You can say that some people just died out, literary, because we are all 60 plus now... Sometimes I do get burned out and tired

(Basia, individual interview, pro-choice)

Through talking to Basia and other pro-choice activists during my fieldwork it became clear that the days of the mass influx of women’s groups taking ownership of the streets of Warsaw in the early 1990s were past. With time, Basia had observed the slow erosion of pro-choice activism in the public sphere. Street activism, according to her, was rare among the pro-choice activists today:

Certainly it was easier to meet up back then and on top of that there was the Oska Calendar which was a typically feminist magazine, for people in the industry so to say, run by this lady (pointing to Gizela).

(Iga, paired interview, pro-choice)

In feminist circles, through the 1990s and in the beginning of 2000s, abortion politics was discussed, as Aneta remarked: ‘ad nauseam’. Aneta reminisced about the radical actions of the feminists at the time with a hint of nostalgia and a certain sense of resignation. She ended on a telling note:

Kasia: And when was all this?

Aneta: It was a long time ago...

(Aneta, paired interview, pro-choice)

Interview after interview, the pro-choice participants spoke of a decline in the movement that they were part of. This was captured well in the film that one of my participants made:

From the ten thousands that were active... and this drop happened within only a few years. There was the 89, 93... and then in 1994... we were standing outside the US embassy because it was some Global Day for

Women and there was only me standing there and Wanda Nowicka... It makes me sad when I remember so many people turning up on the streets, full of anger and willing to commit and engage in the [abortion] issue. And then there was a withdrawal, everyone retired to their homes, their work. We got the sense that our activity was pointless... Nothing happened. And this is how it looks now'. (Podziemne Państwo Kobiet 2009)

Jagoda: Before there was much more of this protest... these kinds of street actions, there was more of that.

(Jagoda, paired interview, pro-choice)

Recently there has not been a street protest solely dedicated to this [abortion]. Nowadays it is more common to show films and organise discussions, it is much more a grassroots debate now.

(Elena, individual interview, pro-choice)

There is a defeatism dominating. It is, I must admit, quite justified if we look at what is going on.

(Iga, paired interview, pro-choice)

This lack of street presence has been analysed by the senior figures in the movement with disappointment and defeatism. A key figure of the pro-choice movement, now also an elected politician, mourns the passing of the pro-choice activism of the 1990s:

I doubt that such a movement [comparing to early 1990s] would be possible today because many former pro-choice activists have slipped back into conformity and passiveness (Nowicka 1997).

When I asked one of the pro-choice activists what kind of actions they conducted now I was met with a short silence:

(pause) We write... it is usually read by people who are already convinced.

(Iga, paired interview, pro-choice)

As evidenced by the pro-choice activists, the movement has changed its spatial presence and is currently mainly active in the semi-public spaces of organised events, writings within academia and popular culture and debates, mainly amongst each other. The move of abortion activism away from the public sphere is intimately linked to the move of actual abortion services to the underground. Academic and pro-choice activist Agata Chełstowska writes:

Once abortion leaves the public sphere, it enters the grey zone of the private. When a woman enters that sphere, her sin turns into gold. Her private worries become somebody else's private gain. And the more abortion is stigmatised in the public sphere, the more women depend on the private sector for solutions (Chelstowska 2011: 99)

The profitable underground abortion world that a woman I met made a film about is one of the reasons flagged up by other participants as to why abortion is kept illegal and consequently underground⁶⁸. Watching the film about the underground world of abortion, I got the sense that at the same time as abortion is performed underground, so was the protest to legalise it. As Nowicka says in the film:

It is not that we are organising ourselves in the underground in order to systematically change the law. Instead we break the law because we do not accept the law. However, unfortunately, this does not correspond to attempts for a broader collective action to change this situation that so many people are unhappy with (Podziemne Państwo Kobiet 2009)

Graff emphasised the task of bringing 'reproductive freedom back into the public sphere' as a priority for feminists (Graff 2003: 113). Judging by the atmosphere almost a decade later during my fieldwork, the possibility of putting abortion back in the public sphere as it had been in the 1990s seemed if anything to be getting ever more remote.

Having lost public support over the last two decades pro-choice groups have vacated the public space of protest, a space quickly occupied by the growing presence of the pro-life movement. Some of the participant narratives echoed suggestions by Graff (2003) and Nowicka (2007) that abortion was entirely located in the private space. Pro-choice group's withdrawal from the public sphere has not, however, been synonymous with a retirement to the private. Rather it was semi-private spaces where the groups mainly operated. As demonstrated in this section, there has been a shift in the ways that abortion politics are played out in the public sphere. Despite being part of the formation of the public sphere in the early 1990s (see Fuszara 1993), in the last two decades the pro-choice movement has been gradually confined to semi-public spaces holding events and writing within academic and activist

⁶⁸ While this thesis is beyond the scope of looking into the very immediate economical consequence of illegal abortion and the way it affects poorer women, it is notable to at least mention the reportedly large profit made from illegal abortions. As Chelstowska (2008) writes in her MA thesis, doctors are an influential group that do not generally join the pro-choice movement on their picket line due to both economical and legislative reasons. In: Chelstowska A. *Aborcja i ruch pro-choice w Polsce. Antropologiczne badania w latach 2006–2008*. Warszawa: Uniwersytet Warszawski; 2008.

feminist circles. All the while the pro-life movement has escalated its public visibility and currently has the stronger presence on the streets.

GENDERED DIVISIONS OF SPACE

The spatial division of abortion politics reveals an asymmetrical use of public spaces by the female- versus male-dominated groups in the conflict. What surfaces is a gendered division of space particularly evident when women in the pro-choice movement inhabit traditionally masculine space. In keeping with the feminist literature, I understand the public sphere as a gendered political space where categories of 'private' and 'public' overlap, blur and collapse into each other in line with the feminist redefinition of politics (Secor 2001). As such, contestations around abortion unveil the multiple ways in which gender is regulated in the public sphere (Butler 2011). Despite mainly operating in the vestibule of the public sphere, pro-choice groups also transgressed the spatialisation of moral codes of women's behaviour (Silvey 2004). Following Simonsen (2000: 9) 'the body and its spatiality, seen as a cultural, political and theoretical battle-field' is key to this part of the chapter.

MEN GUARDING WOMEN'S SPACES

For pro-choice groups, semi-private spaces functioned as a separation from the pro-life groups and their (male) control. Pro-choice events would often be held within enclosed spaces while the streets outside the venues were often occupied by pro-life demonstrators. As such, pro-choice participants were 'policed by discourses defining the boundaries of appropriate gendered, place-based behaviour' (Silvey 2004: 498). The screenings of a film about underground abortion directed by one of my participants was one example that mobilised gendered spatial divisions between pro-choice and pro-life groups. The film screenings were usually held in semi-public spaces such as cultural centres or cafes. An example of pro-choice occupation of semi-public spaces and pro-life occupation of the public space outside was a pro-choice debate in one of Warsaw's central locations. An early note from my field diary illustrates the gendered division:

While walking down Nowy Świat street, on my way to the pro-choice event at the Political Critique⁶⁹, I suddenly had to slow down. Met by a tall red flag, I saw a crowd of around 30 people outside of the venue.

⁶⁹ Political Critique is a left-wing institution publishing magazines, books, holding lectures etc.

There were mostly men in the crowd, demonstrators and some policemen, who were standing in front of a banner in front of the entrance to the venue, looking at it. From afar it looked like a nationalistic scene and indeed the red flag had on it text reading 'Tradition, family'. I crossed the road to get a better view and to be able to snap a picture of the scene. Now I saw posters with images of aborted fetuses and of Hitler. It was a pro-life demonstration protesting against the book launch inside the Political Critique. I took a quick picture and sneaked in past the big images and people debating with or answering questions of the few reporters that had gathered.

(Participant observation, 2011)



FIGURE E - 7.2 PRO-LIFE PROTEST OUTSIDE PRO-CHOICE EVENT, WARSAW
(copyright: kasia narkowicz Press 2011)



FIGURE F - 7.3 PRO-LIFE PROTEST OUTSIDE PRO-CHOICE EVENT, WARSAW
(copyright: kasia narkowicz Press 2011)

These examples show public space to be gendered and sexualised (Longhurst 1996; Bell and Valentine 1995). The scene paints an image of a group of people, mainly men, standing outside a venue where a group of people, mainly women, gathered to discuss abortion politics. With posters alluding to genocide (figure E) and flags with the words 'family' sewn into them (figure G), the male-dominated crowd (standing outside of the pro-choice venue) appeared to be guarding the morality of the women inside. Built into these spatial expressions are moral assumptions about the rightful claims to space of some groups over others (Smith 2000). Reminiscent of a

Foucauldian panopticon (Foucault 1979), the policing gaze of the superior males constantly observed the female-dominated pro-choice activities, even when these activities were relegated to semi-private spaces.

While the main pro-life events I attended were organised by two young women, the vast majority of the attendees at these events were male. In contrast, pro-choice groups in Poland were run by and overwhelmingly comprised of women. As such, the gendered division of space is not only a symbolic and systematic control of women's bodies imposed on them by the Church and the government (explored in chapter 8) but also represents a division where pro-life men occupied public spaces and pro-choice women occupy private and semi-private spaces. Abortion politics interconnects private issues with public issues and troubles the assumed public/private divide (Yuval-Davis 1997). Despite feminist gains in the debate, the spatiality of the gendered division in the abortion conflict uproots conventional gendered divisions between the public and the private, and points to the continued dualistic representation of the female body as located on the private side of the public/private dichotomy. In the words of Kirsten Simonsen (Simonsen 2000: 9) 'the female body represented all that needed to be tamed and controlled'.

TRANSGRESSING SPACE: LANGENORT AND MANIFA

The fragile balance between the private and the public became evident when a Dutch ship delivering abortion services, the *Langenort*, sailed into a Polish port⁷⁰. Its entrance into Polish waters and the subsequent sailing out into international waters with Polish women on board was taboo (Jakubowski 2003) resulting in demonstrations and a media spectacle (Włodarczyk 2003). Women sailing out from the Polish port into international waters symbolically transgressed deeply rooted ideas of the sea as a male space (Stanley 2003). The mythological dimension of the liberty of the sea was challenged by the *Langenort* and its passengers a group of heretical women occupying male territory (Cresswell 1996). Furthermore, the decision to sail into the northern Polish shipyards, the birthplace of the Solidarity movement, further strengthened the symbolic intrusion of the *Langenort* into the male, patriotic and indeed Catholic space (Kosc 2003).

⁷⁰ *Langenort* belonged to the pro-choice organisation Women on Waves and was part of a pro-choice campaign. The Dutch ship provided abortion information and services to Polish women in international waters.

Reactions to the Langenort's arrival highlighted the ideological policing of sexual politics in the Polish public sphere. The reactions were directed towards the women who occupied male territory (the sea and the shipyards) and the women who not only demanded abortion but also boarded a ship that provided them with abortions. Pro-choice groups occupying the public sphere disturbed the dichotomy between the feminine and masculine and were consequently constructed as out of place (Young 1990; Cresswell 1996). The symbolism of women overtaking male territory troubled the moral geographies of women's spatiality (Freeman 2005). This out-of-placeness was noted in some of the reactions to the Langenort and the media discussions praising the pro-life groups that demonstrated against the ship revealed a connection between the making and remaking of the nation and women's reproduction (S Gal and Klingman 2000; Yuval-Davis 1997):

'Bravo Poland wonderful action I felt like during the good old days /.../ These brave faces, these slogans, I get tearful' (Błochowiak, 21.06.2003)

'Great applause to the League of Polish Families and the All Polish Youth... oh my how we hate these women. We feel a justified disgust towards them' (pazdrawljaju, 21.06.2003)

'The worst thing is that all of these loud feminists are ugly as heck! Terrible gobs, something like hitlerjugend [Hitler Youth], zero breast but two freckles. The ugly ones fight to protect their arses, and I ask: Who wants to screw them? A blind idiot I guess' (bierut, 22.06.2003)

Nostalgia for the 'good old days', combined with the bashing of the 'ugly' feminists who function as unwanted women that 'we hate' is reminiscent of Cresswell's (1996) discussion on the bounds of acceptable and desired femininity in the case of the women of Greenham Common. By being described as women who are too ugly to be 'screwed' the women at the shipyards were placed by the commentators in a space outside of the expectations of a 'proper' women's place (Cresswell 1996). In this way, the pro-choice activists experienced treatment similar to that which lesbians who threaten a hegemonic patriarchal construction of femininity experience (Valentine 1993). As Young has argued, such women are reproduced in the media and in popular culture as 'ugly' and met with aggression (Young 1990). Simonsen summarises:

‘Subordinate groups are defined by their bodies and according to norms that diminish and degrade them (for example, as ugly, loathsome, impure, sick and deviant)’ (Simonsen 2000: 8).

The second example of a pro-choice transgression of public space is the *Manifa* - the annual women’s day demonstration⁷¹. The pro-choice groups that I engaged with during my fieldwork were all in some way connected to the feminist movement and feminist activities in Warsaw. As Binnie and Klesse report, the *Manifa* is an event that is both loved and hated by the general public (J. Binnie and Klesse 2012). Participants in my study who were not directly connected to the *Manifa* argued that it was an event that was mainly anti-Church (explored in chapter 8). Every year since 2000, the *Manifa* has had a slogan that they build the demonstration around. In recent years the focus has been on anti-clerical slogans that have upset public opinion (Pacewicz 2012). During the year of my fieldwork in Warsaw, the women marching on the *Manifa* dressed up as priests, purposefully occupying male territory for one day.

While abortion always figures as part of the *Manifa*, it is often in the form of a subtext rather than a key slogan as it did in earlier years (Nowakowska 2012). Feminism in the Polish public sphere enacted through the *Manifa* therefore functions as an example of a way of transgressing gendered public spaces. At times it is a transgression that is dangerous for the women involved.

Once I got hit by a stone on the *Manifa* and for me that was a moment when I thought ‘damn this is dangerous’ because I always thought that we are together, it is great and no one will hurt us and later I realised that all this is dangerous...

(Aneta, paired interview, pro-choice)

The predominant strategy adopted by the women I interviewed was the avoidance of perceived ‘dangerous places’ at ‘dangerous times’ (Valentine 1989). By adopting such defensive tactics women were pressurised into a restricted use and occupation of public space. Another example of such ‘dangerous times’ was at the 2011 Day of Independence when the pro-choice groups were gathering signatures for legal abortion in an alternative demonstration. Participants’ testimonies conveyed a certain nostalgia for the ‘first manifestations’ where the women could be ‘braver’.

⁷¹ Annually on the 8th March, the *Manifa* demonstration is organised by the informal group Porozumienie Kobiet 8 marca [The 8th March Women’s Agreement].

When we collected [signatures] on the 11th November [Polish Day of Independence] and there were bottles with paint flying around it was a bit traumatic. I mean for me it was not so traumatic because I remembered the first Manifestations when different things were flying around, stones and so on I felt kind of like ‘oh there is a fight, oh cool!’

(Edyta, individual interview, pro-choice)

But now we somehow lack this ruthlessness that is characteristic of the pro-life movement.

(Aneta, paired interview, pro-choice)

Edyta and Aneta’s narratives pointed to a shift in the way that the group used space. The loss of ‘ruthlessness’ they spoke of is closely linked to the effect on the women’s use of space following a re-stigmatisation of abortion in the public sphere and a development of geographies of fear (see Valentine 1989).

FEAR OF VIOLENCE

The hostility that the pro-choice women encountered, through physical and material violence in the public sphere, is also gendered. As Valentine (1989, 1993) notes, the patriarchal public sphere is expressed through the restricted presence in public spaces of women due to their fear of male violence:

More things could be done if not for this sentiment present among feminists and generally people working with these issues or those supportive of our values and worldview, that there is an evident... everyone is intimidated. They expected that going out on the street will end up in conflicts.

(Iga, paired interview, pro-choice)

As Koskela notes, the ‘fear of violence is a sensitive indicator of gendered but complex power relations which constitute society and space’ (Koskela 1997: 301). The limitations that female pro-choice activists feel in their use of space are part of the tactics of subordination (Koskela 1997). The ways that the pro-choice movement uses the public sphere ‘is also about the power structures that shape space; about defining, controlling and producing social space... it is a question of power in space (or lack of it)’ (Koskela 1997: 315).

I was braver before... and I found it easier to go out on the streets and do a bunch of things and like I don’t give a shit about anything. And now I know too much and too much has changed on the other side and this has become more difficult...

(Aneta, paired interview, pro-choice)

The pro-choice women feared violence and discrimination because they posed a threat to patriarchal hegemony as was exemplified in the cases of their occupation of the sea and the street (Valentine 1993). The pro-choice feminists out on the streets holding up signs about the right to abortion are, in a similar manner to the women who boarded the *Langenort* ship, gender outlaws in public spaces (Namaste 1996). Transgressions such as that of the *Langenort* went hand in hand with gendered violence that was part of the gendered public sphere:

It turned out to have been a great move with this kind of approach of reaching society... there were cameras... but also right-wingers that nearly pushed the women into the sea...

(Basia, individual interview, pro-choice)

In her research, Valentine (1989) focuses on the stigma that lesbians experience in public space. In my case study, this stigma applied to non-lesbians as women who did not act according to men's expectations by claiming legal abortion (Valentine 1993). As part of the feminist pro-choice movement, the female pro-choice activists did not perform according to a normative femininity. Instead, their behaviour, dress and the slogans that they used classified them as potential recipients of hostility and violence – similar to the violence experienced by lesbians that did not conform to established notions of femininity (Valentine 1993).

Expectations of appropriate behaviour in public space can seem difficult to identify and only becomes clearer through transgressions of the normative gender relations. The women's actions out at sea point to a crossing of gendered boundaries. As Bell and Valentine (1995: 32) put it 'the point at which a person's sexual identity comes under scrutiny reveals the times and places in which corporeality is specified, as well as the places where weaknesses, and possible entry points for change, exist'. Notwithstanding that termination of pregnancies has since 1993 largely taken place in not only private but also hidden and illegal spaces, abortion as a political issue has not disappeared from the public. Even though the recent weakening of pro-choice enthusiasm has been painful for the pro-choice groups to acknowledge, the larger feminist movement maintains a continuous, if small, public presence:

We are still active, working for a right to end a pregnancy on demand is our goal... I know the streets of Warsaw inside out, I am a street feminist and this gives me a lot of pleasure! (laughs)

(Basia, individual interview, pro-choice)

When this presence takes place outside of a space of dialogue and understanding, the larger questions that it poses are whether pro-choice activism, but also pro-life activism, serve a general public or only serve to further the already antagonistic public sphere that they sometimes share? (see Mouffe 2005, 2013)

FROM STREET TO FACEBOOK

This section discusses the impact of the emergence of cyber-geographies for pro-choice and pro-life groups and points to some of the shortcomings of virtual activism and the ways in which it has affected abortion politics in Poland. I consider the effects that virtual geographies have had on the possibilities for wider democratic politics. This is discussed in light of recent work in geography assessing the democratic potential of the virtual sphere (Jazeel 2010; Jackson and Valentine 2014e). However, there is also a need to acknowledge the limits of the emancipatory potential of the internet. As Pickerill (2007) evidenced in her study of alter-globalisation movements, usage of internet can be a hindrance for more radical politics, particularly in instances where face-to-face contact is necessary.

The Internet has in recent years grown to become a space in and through which different groups do activism (Jackson and Valentine 2014d; Pickerill 2006; Pickerill 2007). Warsaw-based pro-choice and pro-life groups both use the virtual sphere in order to mobilise around sexual politics, particularly utilising social media such as Facebook as valuable means for gathering and distributing information. While the pro-choice groups are mainly active online, even in this sphere they still have a smaller following than the pro-life groups – at least on Facebook⁷². The main pro-life group uses Facebook to promote their events, informing followers of demonstrations, vigils, exhibition and other gatherings taking place. While the virtual sphere was not the main space of activism for pro-life groups, it was an important tool that facilitated their street actions, such as the vigils that I attended.

⁷² The main pro-choice organisation had just over 3000 'likes'. The citizen initiative aimed to gather signatures to liberalise the abortion law formed 2011 and was mainly organised online, reaching around 5000 'likes' on Facebook. The main feminist organisation in the country has got over 17 000 'likes' on Facebook and can therefore be compared with the main pro-life group that had over 17 000 'likes' (Numbers noted at the time of writing this chapter, Feb 2014).

During a focus group I conducted in the cold outdoors before a vigil outside a hospital, I asked the five attendees what role the internet played in their pro-life activism:

Aleksander: I found out about this action from the internet.

Sylwia : I am very sensitive towards this issue and am trying to actively take part in any such conversation that is taking place, so this is when it comes to real life interactions with people. On the internet also through propagating and spreading the word about these kind of initiatives.

Milosz: I am trying to be active on the Internet and I am trying to be active in discussions with people and especially with my surroundings at work.

(Focus group, pro-life)

While the internet was present in the activism of most of the pro-life participants in my study, it was the street actions and face-to-face interactions that were emphasised more, confirming the importance of face-to-face interactions in sustaining the momentum of the movement (Pickerill 2006). In contrast, the virtual sphere allowed the pro-choice groups to do much more than inform followers about campaigns and actions. Most of the pro-choice activity actually took place in the virtual sphere:

Now there is internet so it is easier to communicate...

(Gizela, paired interview, pro-choice)

There was a Facebook page, generally we use the Internet.

(Aneta, paired interview, pro-choice)

The internet is more common and more things can be done online now.

(Iga, paired interview, pro-choice)

This division between pro-life and pro-choice use of the internet, where one group (pro-choice) relies on the virtual sphere to a larger degree than the other group (pro-life), further emphasises the gendered public sphere. As I have argued in this chapter, female pro-choice participants pointed to stigma and fear of violence which restricted them in their occupation of public spaces. For some of the pro-choice participants, however, the internet opened up new possibilities (Bernal 2005; Jackson and Valentine 2014e). As Murphy (2009) has argued, the virtual sphere can have a transformative impact on relations in the material sphere. This was true for

Magda, for whom the internet was as a space where she could take more radical actions. Magda used emotions in her political initiative online, as she recognised that emotions play a powerful political role in the debate (Ahmed 2004). Mobilising emotions through visual imagery was a method utilised by the pro-life movement in Poland, but also in other countries such as the UK or Australia (Jackson and Valentine 2014d; McLaren 2013). Mapping the pro-life movement in Australia, McLaren (2013) points to the political importance of emotion for the pro-life visual campaigns. As Magda admitted, the internet was the only space where she used emotive tactics. In the public sphere she argued, this was not the way the pro-choice did activism.

Magda: I adopted the method of the pro-life movement and so I put a photo of every MP that voted in favour of the Parliamentary consideration to start working on a legislation that completely bans abortion, with the signature below it saying ‘they voted in favour of a legislation that will prevent your raped daughter to terminate her pregnancy’ and these kind of texts.

Kasia: And looking back at it do you think this method was effective?

M: You know what... we gained around 3,000 fans on our Facebook page, people that have never heard of our organisation before. We got attention from TVN24 [main TV news channel] so we broke through to the media outlets... The MP announced that he rethought his stance. So to me this was a personal triumph as much as it being a triumph for the cause... because let’s not fool ourselves, he wasn’t sorry at all, it was about elections that were coming up. But one idiot after another might think twice until they vote for something like this in the future.

K: So you created a discussion?

M: There was a discussion but it was a discussion that was very uncensored so therefore I had to delete some comments because people got so upset.

(Magda, individual interview, pro-choice)

The Internet allowed Magda to use tactics that she said she would not have used in the street because of the fear of violence and the stigma of abortion (Koskela 1997). From this perspective the pro-choice move into the virtual sphere can be seen through an emancipatory framework. Moving away from more traditional forms of activism (Kahn and Kellner 2004), online spaces create potential to politicise issues that are held in the private sphere such as the increasingly stigmatised abortion issue in Poland. Further, Morrow argues that virtual spaces can have a significant impact

due to their potential to politicise the everyday in new ways (Morrow, Hawkins, and Kern 2014). As such, online feminist activism creates possibilities for blurring boundaries in the public-private dichotomy (Morrow, Hawkins, and Kern 2014). Virtual spaces such as Facebook pages or blogs where the pro-choice movement dominate create a kind of 'disembodied presence' (Jackson & Valentine 2014:200) which in turn creates a distance from the gendered and patriarchal material sphere. When the online space becomes the central space for activism (see Bernal 2005) it allows pro-choice activists to avoid the exclusion and violence of the gendered public sphere. As their bodies were threatened and stigmatised in the public sphere, for the feminists, the disembodiment that virtual spaces provided were potentially emancipatory (Morrow, Hawkins, and Kern 2014). Indeed, spread across different cities in Poland, the internet allowed the citizen's initiative to connect pro-choice groups across the country. But it is also here that it might have failed.

There are certain issues with the emancipatory potential of online mobilisations (Pickerill 2006). Online spaces do not exist in a vacuum but are rather linked to material spaces, mutually influencing, shaping and reflecting the offline reality (Jackson & Valentine 2014). Existing not away but within social structures, virtual spaces both reflect and reproduce structures existing within material spaces, such as patriarchy (Adams 1997). In this way, the material and the virtual cannot be simply treated as separate entities (Crang 2000). In fact, some of the abuse previously experienced by women in the street can now be observed online. The discussion that Magda created online proved to be fiery and needed to be monitored by Magda herself as 'people got upset'. During a conversation with another pair of pro-choice activists, the issue of verbal abuse on the internet also came up. When I asked them whether the pro-life groups disturb pro-choice spaces, some of the pro-choice online activists suggested that the abuse was located online:

I don't think they do [disturb]. It is more on the internet... they talk about us being murderers and femi-nazis... so [they engage] more in that way.

(Jagoda, paired interview, pro-choice)

While potentially more safe and less violent for women, online spaces can also carry a risk creating a somewhat false impression of safety (see Valentine 1989). This would suggest that the non-material space of the internet creates a spatial isolation

that can result in a lack of felt responsibility on the impact on others that is inherent in the face-to-face contact in material spaces (Jackson and Valentine 2014e; Papacharissi 2002).

At the time of my fieldwork the pro-choice movement was running a nationwide campaign aiming to gather 100,000 signatures from the public to put forward a proposal for the liberalisation of the abortion law. A similar initiative, but for the opposite cause, was running simultaneously on the pro-life side where many of my participants were collecting signatures on the streets and, crucially, before and after Church mass. A major hindrance to the pro-choice group was the fact that the signatures could not be collected online but rather needed to be collected on paper due to the petition's status as a citizen initiative. Some of the pro-choice women who collected signatures told me of the strategies they employed:

Kasia: And in what ways were you involved, what did you do?

Jagoda: We collected signatures.

Kasia: And did you collect among people you knew or did you go out on the streets?

Jagoda: No, no, it was more that there were petitions laid out here in the office and we announced that people can come to us and sign it... more in this way.

K: You didn't go out on the street?

J: No.

K: Ok and you Aneta?

A: Um... I collaborated with the initiative as well... in the beginning I helped out with the graphics as well and made some posters or something like that, and later we did some events with UFA, I don't know, it was more cultural and music events where it was important to have a stand where signatures could also be collected.

K: And how was the interest? Do you remember any conversations among people who signed or didn't sign the petition?

(Pause)

K: Any voices of opposition among your group maybe?

J: On the contrary, actually, but perhaps that is because people who attend these kinds of events or come to this kind of organisations already have a grounded worldview.

(Jagoda and Aneta, paired interview, pro-choice)

The way that the citizen initiative took off, within familiar and seemingly safe spaces, also meant that the initial work involved groups and individuals that were already supportive of the proposed initiative. In this way, rather than affirming Woo-Young's (2005) understanding of 'netizens' as challenging the social order, the initial steps of the pro-choice citizen initiative rather affirmed the divide between pro-choice groups and the rest. When asked about the effectiveness of the internet, the online activists showed certain scepticism:

People from the industry read it because it was interesting and fun and you would find updates on what was going on in the circles... But it turns out that internet is not so straightforward.

(Iga, paired interview, pro-choice)

Jagoda and Aneta, both of whom started their activism in the early 2000s on the street and have both since retired to semi-private and online spaces said of online spaces:

Kasia: And is it successful, does it work, that the work has moved online?

Jagoda: I am not sure...

Aneta: I would not be so sure about that...

(Jagoda and Aneta, paired interview, pro-choice)

The collection of signatures initially took place among the crowd deemed already sympathetic to the cause:

... during debates, conferences, seminars, workshops so in the scale of the country... we were gathering a bit among our own group these conferences are attended by the same people all the time and these people have usually already signed the petition...

Agata: We had quite a few duplicates...

Gizela: Yes so in the scale of the whole country we are maybe able to get 15,000 signatures in that way.

(Agata and Gizela, paired interview, pro-choice)

The extent to which the internet can be part of a democratic public sphere has been debated both generally (Bernal 2005; Papacharissi 2002; Tsaliki 2002) and also recently in the matter of abortion politics (Jackson & Valentine 2014). While

Jackson & Valentine (2014) claim that the virtual sphere of the internet can, for debates such as abortion politics, function as a space for democratic discussion, the authors also caution about the limitations of such democratic potential of the internet. The biggest challenge to the thesis that virtual spaces can facilitate democracy was when the citizen's initiative was forced to venture outside of its own circle of feminist and pro-choice activists and their allies. The citizen's initiative, in contrast to other campaigns, required 100,000 signatures to be collected in order for the proposal to legalise abortion to be put up for discussion in Parliament. Due to the nature of a citizen's initiative, the signatures could not be gathered online as identification needed to be verified at the time of signing the petition. This required the pro-choice groups to re-enter the public sphere. This proved difficult for a number of reasons. For a movement that has for a decade been less active in material spaces and increasingly active in virtual spaces, the task of mobilising in the material sphere proved challenging. There was a distinct lack of people who were willing to go out to the streets:

We did not have enough people to go out there.

(Iga, paired interview, pro-choice)

The key to gathering signatures is to get out on the streets. And we lacked people that would be willing to give up their time, stand on the streets, approach strangers, actively engage them in conversation and ask them to sign...

(Gizela, paired interview, pro-choice)

Edyta: What we did not manage to accomplish was to gather a large group of people to collect signatures, simply.

Kasia: On the streets?

Edyta: Yes, on the streets. It did not translate into a mass movement.

(Edyta, individual interview, pro-choice)

The difficulty for the pro-choice movement was located in utilising 'traditional methods' in their activism. That is, moving away from activism within the group itself and establishing methods to 'reach ordinary people' using methods such as standing outside of metro stations with petitions. The lack of street presence is understood by several of the pro-choice activists as the biggest issue and the

ultimate reason why the citizen's initiative did not reach its target of gathering 100,000 signatures:

Gizela: The thing that we fell flat on was... these more traditional methods of gathering signatures. The conferences and debates we had were exhausted, so we had to come out on the streets because we needed to reach ordinary people, especially as we could not count on the media. So suddenly it turned out that we have got no people who we could stand on the streets with.

Kasia: How many people were involved in collecting signatures?

Gizela: You know... it is so different... We needed at least 15 people to register the Committee... There were those who were very active but did not join the Committee. I must say that when it comes to the most active people, those that were really involved... few of them were long-term activists in women's organisations or feminist organisations, I would even say that these women [from the feminist organisations] were least active.

(Gizela, paired interview, pro-choice)

Women's fear of violence in the public sphere (see Valentine 1989) in this case fuelled by the growing stigma of abortion (Jackson and Valentine 2014a) made many participants uneasy about taking the campaign to the streets:

I got this thing that I would like to take part in such an action and I see that many people around me also have this feeling that they would want to but they are a little bit afraid...

(Aneta, paired interview, pro-choice)

I also was out on the streets... it was very unpleasant. I hate it and every time I went out on the street I wanted to bite my own finger...

(Edyta, individual interview, pro-choice)

I understand that not everyone can do it. It is one thing to stand with a banner and wait for people to approach us and that would only happen if the media would constantly be on the issue reporting that there is such and such initiative going on and then people would recognise us. But here the job was to catch people, to come up to them and say good day I come from... Yes to Women, I am gathering signatures...

(Gizela, paired interview, pro-choice)

... not under a petition for protecting dolphins but under a petition for protecting women! Women are afraid to speak up during lectures at university not to mention going out on the streets and asking for a signature. [It] is an important matter for our movement to teach girls assertiveness and run courses so that a woman who hears that she is a

bitch and murderer when she is collecting signatures won't run home and cry but treat this as something that must happen and she must move on and ask for another signature, that is what I think.

(Magda, individual interview, pro-choice)

Even though Magda campaigned online, she found it important to challenge women's fear of public space activism as an important task for the pro-choice movement. Koskela's study on women's fear of public spaces talks of the 'bold walk' assumed by women who, despite fear of and risks in public spaces, go out 'courageous and confident' and therefore become active agents in challenging the male-dominated and potentially violent public space (Koskela 1997: 316). While such a reading of women's fear of public space would in the Polish context ignore the pro-life and religious radicalisation that has flooded the public sphere in the last two decades, it nevertheless was the case that those who dared to go out to collect signatures on the streets were often positively surprised by the public response:

I was convinced that people would refuse [to sign the petition]. In the beginning when I collected the signatures I used self-censorship... I said it was about refunding for contraception, refunding for in-vitro fertilisation, sexual education in schools and only at the end did I say that this is also about liberalisation of the law regarding termination of pregnancy. And later I gave up on it and started with that and people signed happily.

(Gizela, paired interview, pro-choice)

Edyta, who earlier said that going out on the street was 'unpleasant' but who went out anyway, motivated people from outside of the feminist movement to join her in collecting signatures for the initiative:

It was quite funny actually because I mobilised a group of my friends who are not from feminist organisations... I said 'we are going together out on the streets and you must come with me because I won't go out there on my own! We went with a whole group, me, my two friends, our male friend and then my husband. And the men gave out leaflets and our friend is completely...like he hates taking part in such actions, he is like 'aaaah!' but what don't you do for friendship (laughs)

(Edyta, individual interview, pro-choice)

Even though the women who did go out on the street, such as Gizela, Agata and Edyta, reported on their experiences as in the end surprisingly positive, most of the established pro-choice activists that I spoke to did not go out on the streets at all.

The lack of feminists out on the streets was a disappointment to one of the organisers of the citizen's initiative, who linked it to a 'lack of commitment':

I will tell you honestly as a person who comes from the feminist movement where I am active, to me a big disappointment are the organisations, women's and feminist organisations... We have never tried this kind of thing and this really demands a real commitment and declaration like 'ok we will give this much and we will give this much' so I don't know... maybe we are living in some sort of a mythical future. But if we ought to try it again then it could have been different

(Gizela, paired interview, pro-choice)

Basia collected signatures for both the 1989 and the 2011 citizen initiatives. She remembered that back in 1989 they collected a million signatures against the criminalisation of abortion, while this time around in 2011 the pro-choice movement struggled to collect even 50,000 signatures:

I am very happy that it [the citizen's initiative] is going on, we are collecting signatures wherever we can. But this is still very different from when I worked in the cultural centre of the Ochota neighbourhood and people who didn't even know me but knew what I was doing would find me and want to sign the petition. And now we have to go and find the people.

(Basia, individual interview, pro-choice)

Grounding these findings in literature on cyber-geographies and the public sphere, my data challenge the more optimistic conclusions on the potential of the virtual sphere to facilitate and broaden democracy rooted in a Habermasian notion of the public sphere. Situating my data within the frailty of the Habermasian public sphere, I argue for recognition of the internet's limited emancipatory and counter-hegemonic potential. The main issue with adopting a Habermasian notion of the public sphere without addressing its valid critique as rational, male and bourgeoisie (Fraser 1990) is that it risks creating a false starting point for assessing the democratic potential of the public sphere. The public sphere was modelled by Jürgen Habermas (Habermas 1991) on 18th century coffee houses and conceptualised as public spaces where private individuals deliberated over common concerns through rational and critical debate (C. Calhoun 2010). The critique of this concept as hegemonic bourgeois and masculinist is widely recognised (Fraser 1990,

Calhoun 2010, Benhabib, 1992, Young, 2000)⁷³. In short, Habermas' 'democratic' public sphere is undemocratic and excludes those who are not male, bourgeoisie or engaged in 'rational' discussion. Not only has Habermas' public sphere been criticised for its (gender, class and race) exclusivity by Nancy Fraser (1990), Benhabib significantly argued that the Habermasian public sphere excludes issues understood to be located in the private realm, such as reproductive rights (Benhabib 1992). It is in combining the critical reading of the Habermasian notion of the public sphere with the critical reading of the virtual public sphere as interlinked and mutually constitutive with the material space, that the argument of a causative link between the rise of the internet as a space for activism and democracy becomes problematic.

CONCLUSION

Abortion politics has undergone a gradual but significant shift over the last two decades with pro-life groups entering the public sphere while simultaneously pro-choice groups have gradually vacated it. This withdrawal from the public sphere of the pro-choice groups has been nurtured over time by the re-stigmatisation of abortion in the public sphere. However, the shift away from the public sphere has not meant that the pro-choice movement has disappeared or retired entirely into the private sphere, as some Polish feminist scholars and activists have suggested (Graff 2003; Nowicka 1997). Rather, I have shown that the groups have moved into semi-public spaces and the virtual sphere.

Despite the fact that some literature on emerging cyber-geographies argues for the emancipatory potential of the internet (Morrow, Hawkins, and Kern 2014), other literature in the same area presents a more tempered enthusiasm for the virtual sphere as both potentially enhancing democratic processes and simultaneously limiting democracy (Jackson and Valentine 2014e; Pickerill 2006). It is this fragility that is crucial to developing an understanding of the Polish public sphere and the role that the abortion conflict plays within it. The findings presented in this chapter suggests that on the one hand, the internet encouraged pro-choice groups in my study to be active online and their group activism was often taken away from the public sphere deemed patriarchal and potentially violent. In this way, my data suggests that the virtual sphere can function as an alternative space to the hegemonic

⁷³ See chapter 2 on theory for critical discussion of Habermas' public sphere.

public sphere. On the other hand, and this is where my data contradicts some of the literature presented here, the use of the internet in my case study by pro-choice groups did not translate into activism and presence of the pro-choice groups in the material space. In fact, the internet potentially curbed the democratic participation of the pro-choice groups. While potentially, the rise of the virtual sphere facilitated democracy by providing spaces for activism for the pro-choice movement, it simultaneously failed them at a crucial moment in its inability to reach beyond the 'converted' and mobilise the collection of signatures on the streets to democratically challenge and change the abortion legislation.

CHAPTER 8.

ABORTION AND ‘MATKA POLKA’: THE RELIGIOUS & THE SECULAR

INTRODUCTION

This chapter teases out the religious and the secular in the abortion conflict. It considers the abortion conflict as a symbolic conflict that interweaves tensions within and between Catholicism, secularism, nationalism and gender. Since its legalisation in 1957 and subsequent ban in 1993 the abortion issue has played a key symbolic role, used by the Communist state, the post-Communist government and the Catholic Church in political negotiations during the transition from Communist to democratic rule and later in the accession to the European Union in 2004 (Alsop and Hockney 2001).

The idea of the nation imagined and framed through motherhood have played a central role in this debate (Yuval-Davis 1997; Janion 2006; Alsop and Hockney 2001; Hill Collins 2005). Bringing religious and secular discourses to the fore, this chapter asks how opposing groups mobilise these discourses and explores the extent to which the pro-choice and pro-life claims are motivated by the presence of religion and the Church?

THE IMAGINED NATION: CATHOLICISM AND POLISHNESS

A few days before Polish Independence Day in 2011 a debate was organised at a Warsaw universities by one of the pro-life Catholic participants in my study. Entitled ‘What does Polishness mean today’ the panel was comprised of a former right wing politician, a priest and a right-wing journalist. Discussing the troubled ‘Polish values’, the panel spoke of the importance of the maintenance of a Polishness closely linked to Catholicism:

What is Polishness? Polishness is an identity and a community. It is a community of nationality, language, culture and also religion.

(Rafal Ziemkiewicz, participant observation, Patriotic Debate, 2011)

[Catholic Church] has always accompanied the nation and was present during different events in history.

(Priest Bogdan Bartold, participant observation, Patriotic Debate, 2011)

The backbone of Polishness historically happens to be the Catholic Church. Despite its weaknesses, it is the backbone of Polishness, even though it might not be adequately appreciated in modern Poland.

(Andrzej Zybertowicz, participant observation, Patriotic Debate, 2011)

What seemed central to the stability of the Polish national imaginary was a reinstatement of values understood as core to a Polish identity, such as Catholicism. What also came through in the participant observation I conducted during this event was an awareness, although defensively articulated, that what symbolised Polish values was slowly withering away.

Throughout my fieldwork I noted a general acceptance of the inseparability of Polishness and Catholicism. Central to this Catholic identity was the discourse on sexual politics and its role in the constitution of the national imaginary. Graff (2003:103) aptly summarised Poland as being a ‘country whose laws and customs concerning sexual mores and reproduction are, to put it mildly, heavily influenced by the Roman Catholic Church’. The symbolic figures of the Polish Pope John Paul II and the Virgin Mary play leading roles in the Church’s involvement in the abortion conflict, but also in the resistance to it. In the Polish imaginary, they function respectively as role model and ideal.

THE POLISH POPE

‘The election of Karol Wojtyła, a young cardinal from Poland, as the new Pope John Paul II helped Poles keep their faith and gave them strength to continue their fight for democracy. The new head of the Roman Catholic Church was a skilful diplomat and charismatic spiritual leader. *Unfortunately for Polish women*, however, his long, conservative papacy fortified the institutional church in the country and made it immune to reform’ (Grzywacz 2013: 36, *my emphasis*)

Both the pro-life and the pro-choice groups drew on the legacy of the Polish Pope John Paul II during interviews and public debates. Several years after his passing the Pope’s influence on the lives of Polish people remains strong with as many as 73% of Poles claiming that he influences their values⁷⁴ (CBOS 2010). The Pope had an immense influence on the Catholic Church’s views on sexuality, particularly that of reproduction and women. The legacy of the Pope contributed to a division between

⁷⁴ Scoring third after the influences of their ‘own thoughts’ and their ‘parental influence’ (CBOS 2010)

Catholics on the one side and feminists on the other, a separation that bred antagonisms:

It was much easier to be a priest when we had John Paul II, because when he was there we listened to what he had to say. Not by coincidence did the concept of the JP generation come about. And this concept now turns against us

(Priest Bogdan 2011, participant observation, Patriotic Debate, 2011)

I think that we are seen as Popeland, not Poland but Popeland. That we are associated with Waleśa, the Pope and vodka... You know if someone looks at the indicators and they have an intelligence level higher than that of a slipper then taking into consideration the access to contraception in Poland, the number of births and the official number of abortions together with our birth rates, they will be able to draw logical conclusions. Because I don't think anyone will believe that Poles have stopped having sex.

(Magda , individual interview, pro-choice)

Even if someone didn't understand what John Paul said... no one had any doubts. And now I have a strange feeling that with the death of John Paul even that time is gone. And today there is a trend for... (pause) well exactly [suggesting there is a trend for nothing].

(Arek, focus group, pro-life)

Whether expressed cynically by pro-choice groups or with admiration by pro-life groups, the figure of the late Polish Pope John Paul II was of central importance in understanding the abortion conflict. Pro-choice participant Amelia for example talked about the ideal woman as a central protagonist in the abortion conflict and the significance of the late Pope to the construction of the ideal image of a woman as a mother.

VIRGIN MARY AND THE RE-CREATION OF THE IDEAL WOMAN

In Poland we have got a very specific model of an ideal woman. The Queen of Poland... so you see what ideal there is. And this certain vision of a woman was also promoted by Pope John Paul II.

(Amelia, individual interview, pro-choice)

Motherhood functions as a gatekeeper to the sustainability of a nation. As emphasised by Patricia Hill Collins (2005) idealised motherhood frames the national identity. The notion of family, and particularly motherhood, is a key site through which Polishness is understood (Yuval-Davis 1997). Since the 18th century a nation

was often imagined ‘through a women’s body, generally a mother but also a virgin or a Mother Virgin’ (Janion 2006: 267). As the Queen of Poland, the figure of Virgin Mary has been placed on the national pedestal, representing Polishness in times of war and struggle, not least during the resistance to Communism when the image was pinned to the chest of the opposition leader Lech Wałęsa (Płatek 2004). Primarily, however, Virgin Mary represents ideal womanhood (Janion 2006). The woman, the guardian of the Polish nation, is embodied in the Matka-Polka [Mother Pole] figure; a symbol of tradition and morality (Eberts 1998; A. Kramer 2009) with attributes such as sainthood, virginity, maternal forbearance and devotion (Płatek 2004) but also martyrdom and sacrifice for the nation (Janion 1996). When a Polish woman therefore wants legal access to abortion on demand, she challenges more than just pro-life legislation. She rejects a set of values etched into the Polish imaginary that were reinvigorated post 1989.

In the immediate aftermath of the end of Communist rule abortion became a central tool in the project to reinstate Polish values best symbolised by ‘a strong position of traditional, heterosexual, patriarchal large family’ that rejected ‘unnatural forms of family planning’ (Wojnicka and Pędziwiatr 2010: 8). As articulated by Yuval-Davis (1997:4) ‘nationhood is gendered’ and women as ‘bearers of collectivities’ (Yuval-Davis 1997:ix) are those who ‘reproduce nations biologically, culturally and symbolically’ (Yuval-Davis 1997: 2). With the focus on the Virgin Mary, the abortion conflict illustrates a disruption in the national imagination of the country, one of strong male homosocial bonds with the crucial figure of the woman as the mother, key to the reproduction of the fatherland (Janion 2006). When the pro-life participants spoke of women and abortions, they consistently equated a woman with a mother and emphasised the woman’s emotional traits as central. Pregnant women were sometimes referred to as fragile, delicate, confused and lacking awareness.

I think that every human being who makes such decisions ... every woman is herself confused and is dealing with many contradictory emotions and feeling bad.

(Aldona, individual interview, pro-life)

During pro-life vigils organised outside of hospitals, the participants were praying for women who went through abortions:

Julia: I am also here to oppose what goes on in this hospital and to offer a prayer for the parents of those unborn children and of course for those children.

Kasia: And how would you describe them?

Julia: Lost...

Szymon: I agree...

Milosz: Yes...

Zuzanna: I think these are people... I don't want to say non-educated but simply maybe they do not know the other side, they have not been informed.

(Focus group, pro-life)

During one participant observation a priest who led the pro-life vigil urged the participants to pray for the women who had committed a sin. Women who had terminated their pregnancies are described as 'lost', 'uninformed' or 'uneducated'. This image was sometimes contrasted with the figure of a rational man strengthening a dichotomous position between a weak woman and a man symbolising aggression and decisiveness.

I think it is important, always, when a woman stands before the decision... when she thinks whether she should give birth or do an abortion... the role of the man is very important here. The man's role is terribly important, because of the fact that she is a woman and she is sometimes fragile and delicate and if there won't be a man's fist (hitting fist lightly on desk) then she will make a decision, but completely without any awareness... and then for the rest of her life she will suffer or it will later come out somehow.

(Wiktoria, focus group, pro-life)

What is emphasised in the pro-life accounts is the tired trope of false consciousness targeted towards pregnant women, suggesting that they are too 'emotional' and 'unaware' to make decisions. This confirms a set of dichotomous constructions commonly ascribed where women/men, nature/civilisation and public/private are understood in binary opposition (Yuval-Davis 1997). An assumed passivity of the ideal woman, the mother, reflects a (heterosexual) division of gender roles that defines masculinity and femininity (Hubbard 2000). As Graff points out, women fighting for the right to abortion are constructed in a dichotomous position to what is important for the collective imagined identity and reproduction of the Catholic

nation, subsequently becoming a threat to family values (Graff 2003). Narratives embedded in the cult of the Virgin Mary were understood by pro-choice participants such as Basia as obsessive and dogmatic:

I became really negative towards the Church already as a young person, this aversion towards women, the suspicion, the obsession... This dogmatic obsession about virginity, the virgin Mary and mother of Christ, I mean either she was a virgin or she gave birth, she can't have done both!

(Basia, individual interview, pro-choice)

The model of the family entertained by pro-life groups was a way to confirm gender identities within the realm of motherhood and fatherhood that were central to the Catholic project. This project saw as its role a reinstatement of traditional Polish values that were understood to have been suspended under Communist rule (Hubbard 2000). Amelia talked about the stigma and sin attached to women that diverge from an ideal vision of a woman seen as a mother:

The ideal woman in Poland is not one that decides for herself and is independent but rather sacrifices herself for the society and does what is good for others... and a woman that says 'this is my body and I decide' is seen as a bad woman, a selfish one that does whatever she pleases. And it is only the woman that is judged and punished, in a symbolic and non-symbolic way... Women are blamed for their sins.

(Amelia, individual interview, pro-choice)

Amelia brought up the tensions around the pro-choice discourse of choice and rights to one's own body. This she linked to the traditional Catholic vision of a woman as a martyr sacrificing her body for her nation (Janion 1996):

There has to be a reason as to why a woman would want to have an abortion. She cannot just say that she doesn't want a child... it is assumed a woman wants a child. And that is the way we think of women.

(Amelia, individual interview, pro-choice)

Amelia's narrative reflects that of a woman as a 'brave victim' embodied by a Polish self-sacrificing woman (Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk 2000). Women who had unwanted pregnancies represented a threat to the 'heteropatriarchal' power relations. Such women were going against the assigned gender roles of women that focussed on reproduction. Despite the woman being the central character in the

debates around sexual politics, pregnant women were rarely visible. This is in contrast to the pro-life movements in for example the UK where pregnant women were visible as pro-life activists and often participated in pro-life demonstrations (Jackson and Valentine 2014d). As was shown in the previous chapter it was men that dominated the pro-life movement and women who dominated the pro-choice movement. Pro-life activist Ava who is also feminist, found this problematic and linked it to a certain taboo/stigma and intimidation:

What is characteristic for Polish pro-life... is that there is none, none, there is completely no women that have undergone abortion and that would be loud activists in the Polish pro-life. And I don't think it is because there are none out there because there are quite a few of them, but it is because the movement... I have the impression that abortion is distant from reality, so it is there and it is a bad thing but there is no analysis about whether it occurs, who it happens to and what to do when it happens.

(Ava, individual interview, pro-life)

These narratives point to a paradox. At the same time as mothers are put on a pedestal in the Polish national imagination, the visibility of mothers is controlled in a public sphere. The idealisation of the invisible mother, the woman that is neither materially present in the pro-life or pro-choice demonstrations or public spaces, points to uneven morality applied to the private and the public spaces (D. M. Smith 2000):

People do their own thing, women go through abortions and they tell no one. While working with this, I have spoken to a lot of women that have never spoken about their abortions to anyone, not even their best friend because they were religious and the woman feared their reaction.

(Amelia, individual interview, pro-choice)

According to Graff (2003) the shame attached to unwanted pregnancies is a result of Church pressure:

'Within that division, 'unwanted pregnancies are things that happen to someone else, and if one happens to us or one of our friends, an abortion is "arranged" in much the same way one "arranged" access to scarce goods under Communism' (Graff 2003:113).

Pro-life feminist Ava did not talk much of the Church but had issues with the lack of openness of the dominant groups within the pro-life movement:

The pro-life movement in Poland is quite judgemental and it is not easy on the people who went through such a thing [abortion]. It does not welcome them with open arms.

(Ava, individual interview, pro-life)

Here, stigma around woman's visibility is used to maintain division of women's, and mothers, proper place (Jackson and Valentine 2014a). Such 'madonna and whore' narratives function to make sense of what is proper and intelligible behaviour of women (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007). An example of negotiating between a proper and an improper woman was demonstrated by a male pro-life interviewee who talked of women who became pregnant because of rape and suggested that the dirty memory of the rape can be fixed by giving birth:

She has been through a disaster when she got raped and if she has an abortion she will have a second disaster, so... and if she gives birth then the pro-abortion groups say that for the rest of her life this child will remind her of... but it is ridiculous, it is fabricated... it is not like that, this child cleans away the bad memories.

(Paweł, focus group, pro-life)

As was demonstrated in the previous chapter women who were considered outside of the appropriate boundaries of proper femininity (Cresswell 1996), such as feminists demonstrating in public spaces and occupying male territories of the sea, were labelled as deviant, ugly and out of place (see Cresswell 1996). A baby was regarded by the pro-life participant as a 'cleanser'. Paweł's narrative suggested that raped women were also positioned outside of acceptable femininity that emphasises virginity and therefore needed to be 'cleansed' with a child. As Sibley (1995) argues, associations made between dirt, ugliness and imperfection are ways in which borders to unwanted otherness are defined. This boundary is relevant in understanding essentialised gender hierarchies. Sibley (1995:7) formulates this as 'the imperative of distancing from shit, reflects a particularly masculine concern for autonomy and separateness'. Further, the distance desired from those understood to be dirty and impure (in my case study these are women who got pregnant and did not want to remain pregnant) reflects a threat experienced as coming from the outside and destabilising the norms (referring to non-Polish/Catholic values) felt by

some groups (often pro-life males in my study). Sibley (1995) looks to Kristeva when making the point that what is impure never can be removed and therefore while it is excluded it always has a threatening presence. Understanding this in relation to the impure woman going against idealised womanhood as embodied by the *Matka Polka*, sexual politics reflect a constant 'hovering' threat marking a disruption of established hierarchies. Sibley further looks to Gross when she argues that this hovering presence of otherness 'registers a nervousness about... things out of place' (Sibley 1995: 7). As articulated by pro-life participant Paweł, there was only one option available for a pregnant woman that was out of place:

It is obvious that when a woman is pregnant the only way is to give birth to this child... one of the priests said that once a woman came to him pregnant. Because it was the result of rape and said she wanted to have an abortion the priest said that he could help her to perhaps give the child for adoption so that she wouldn't kill it. The women left and then after some time she came back with a baby, right, happy and smiling.

(Paweł, focus group, pro-life)

In the two narratives above women are constructed as in need of male support, here entertaining binary oppositions such as moral/immoral and responsible/irresponsible (Fuszara 1993). The continuous reference to a woman as a mother and her pregnancy as a child and abortion as murder, was common among the pro-life participants. As Krzyżanowska argues, the terminology of 'pro-life' in contrast to 'pro-choice' sounds heroic (2012). The tensions over abortion are played out 'above women's heads' and focus mainly on the 'unborn child' (Krzyżanowska 2012: 183)⁷⁵.

RIGHTS OF WOMEN VERSUS RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

As was shown in the previous chapter, there has been a gradual escalation of pro-life visibility in the public sphere since 1989 with the pro-life groups filling the spaces previously occupied by pro-choice groups. According to Krzyżanowska who studied women's presence in the public sphere before and after the democratic transformation, 'feminists in Poland lost the battle of language surrounding abortion that took place in the public debate' (Krzyżanowska 2012: 183). The pro-choice groups argued that such rhetoric was a result of a 'stolen language' (interview with

⁷⁵ This is not to diminish the significance of the abortion conflict as an issue in its own right, a conflict in which many women suffer, and die, as a consequence of the legal status of abortion (see Snochowska-Gonzales 2011).

Basia). Both groups focussed on rights. The pro-life group argue for the ‘rights of the unborn child’ and the pro-choice group for the ‘rights of women’⁷⁶. Basia remembers the language around abortion during Communist times as being very different from what it is now:

I’m sure you will hear them say ‘you cannot kill a sick baby’. This twisting of words that have existed in the Polish vocabulary for centuries, like [the word] foetus. Suddenly these words are exchanged for words like child, human, citizen... and the pressure is enormous. 25 years, right, it was year 1993 but from 1989 the Church has been pressuring on this issue... and now we hear that there is no such thing as a foetus!

(Basia, individual interview, pro-choice)

I am generally... opposed to abortion... this is linked to the fact that I regard unborn children as humans

(Zygmunt, individual interview, pro-life)

Zygmunt talked of the acceptance of children as human beings without questioning the reference to a child or referring to an embryo or foetus. The Polish Pope’s interpretation of human dignity in the 1995 *Evangelium Vitae* encyclical was a key moral signpost for the pro-life movement (Wojnicka and Pędziwiatr 2010). In this document the Pope claims that no one has a right to kill an innocent person, even in the shape of an embryo or a foetus. Such language has been reemphasised by the current Pope (Pope Francis) who has continued the legacy of John Paul II in strongly emphasising the human aspects of abortion in stating that ‘it is horrific to think that there are children, victims of abortion, who will never see the light of the day’ (GW 2014).

So if there is someone who goes up to that women and says ‘you don’t have to do this, there are organisations that will help you’ and I have heard this from people who are standing outside these clinics, perhaps not demonstrating but advising these people or praying... they were often saying that these women, even if they enter the clinic after speaking to them, often come straight out again. Because here they found hope and in there was only death

(Aldona, individual interview, pro-life)

⁷⁶ The problematic aspects of the rights-narrative in abortion is beyond the scope of this thesis but further explored by other authors (Dea 2014; Schwartzman 2006)

Let's say that a raped woman becomes pregnant, the perpetrator will get three, four years in jail. The conceived child will get a death penalty straight away... this foetus... is punished with the death penalty...

(Zygmunt, individual interview, pro-life)

People's support for legal abortion is decreasing, we can see this in the opinion polls. Especially when it comes to support for abortion on request, as we talked about this way of thinking that this is my body and my choice... in Poland there is little understanding for this. When you say things like 'my body my decision' it is regarded as extreme.

(Amelia, individual interview, pro-choice)

Amelia's arguments about a woman's choice and the right to her own body were unpopular among the pro-life participants who did not consider a pregnancy to be a women's choice and solely part of a women's body:

Kasia: From the other side [you hear arguments about] the right of women to their own bodies. How do you feel about these claims?

Arek: You said a woman has the right to her own body... she has 100% right to it...

Kasia: This is how the pro-choice arguments run...

Arek: No... it is not even an argument. The child inside the woman has got the same rights, the same, that's it. It is true that a woman has the right to defend herself, she has the right to speak out and can say more than the child...

(Arek, focus group, pro-life)

Sketched carefully, the pro-life rhetoric is based on an understanding of the foetus as a child from its conception. In contrast, the pro-choice movement argues that the foetus should be considered a foetus as distinct from a child. As pro-life groups are often linked to the Catholic Church, their values and views on abortion are understood to reflect Catholic teachings of the respect for human life from conception until natural death (Wojnicka & Pedziwiatr 2010). This is well illustrated by the two examples below, the first from a pro-life Catholic focus group and the second from an interview with a pro-choice atheist:

Pawel: I don't think these people realise that already from conception we have to deal with a human being, right, from these two cells joined together comes out a human that we can see here and now, right, that has two hands and two legs...

Arek: There needs to be this awareness that an embryo is a human being.

Paweł: Yes... this is specifically about that this is a person, right? That is the most important thing.

Arek: A human, of course.

Paweł: Exactly, that it is a human. And this... we can say that an embryo has a unique DNA... exactly... that after a week it will be something that will look like something that reminds us of a human being, right.

(Arek and Paweł, focus group, pro-life)

To me a foetus is not a human being. I am one of the oldest activists for women's right to abortion. Not only because of my age but also because of how many years I have been involved. So I have got the experience and the education. So I won't let anyone make an idiot out of me. As much as I separate a tadpole from a frog, an egg from a hen... And being raised in the countryside I have observed the processes of nature and it is obvious that at some point something that was a seed becomes a tree so it is not that during all stages in the process it is always about cutting down a tree.

(Basia, individual interview, pro-choice)

The quotes from pro-life feminist Ava nuance the strict division employed between the pro-life and pro choice accounts:

It is obvious that it [foetus] is not entirely her [a woman's] body because that would mean that the woman at some point had two hearts, which is not entirely true. However obviously it is within her body and this can't be negated. I think we all make out a certain dependency but this relation of being joined by a body in a sort of inseparable way is a very specific relationship and I am aware of that and how difficult it is to compare it to any other situation that takes place after the birth.

(Ava, individual interview, pro-life)

While most pro-life participants in this study spoke of abortion in terms of 'children', not all did. Ava, who is a pro-life activist and a feminist, uses the terms embryo and foetus. After having completed a number of interviews with pro-life groups, I was surprised to hear Ava talk about foetuses and asked her about it:

Kasia: You are using the word foetus...

Ava: Yes I do...

K: Not child, as many pro-life people do? They speak almost exclusively about a child. Do you do it [use the word foetus] intentionally?

A: Yes... foetus is a description of a stage in a human's development in the prenatal stage that starts around the eight week of pregnancy and beforehand it is an embryo. And to me it is the same description a toddler, new born, teenager, child...

K: And why do you think that pro-life people talk of child always?

A: I don't know, to be honest, but I think that it is about a dehumanisation of the foetus. The foetus was never humanised, but we should look at the foetus and describe it just as it is, without cute photos of already born children but to show how it looks at different stages of development and not be afraid that in the early stages it can look more like a lizard rather than what we consider being a human because it is a matter of what we have built in in our heads. It is not that universally something is a child because it looks like a toddler, or it is a human because it looks like a child, it is rather about what associations we have in our heads and perhaps we need to take a look at the foetus, see what it is, and think how it is to be this foetus and not run away from this stadium.

(Ava, individual interview, pro-life)

While Ava argued for the 'dehumanisation' of the foetus, some pro-life participants argued for using the term 'child' as appropriate labelling for what they regarded a child from conception:

Discussions regarding whether the foetus is a human being are discussions within the social sciences, these are philosophical. We can discuss it in social terms, meaning what kind of characteristics does one need to have to be recognised as a person or as a human in the social sense. And I think that these discussions are always quite slippery because they are always about some power relations.

(Ava, individual interview, pro-life)

In the next quote, Zygmunt emphasises the accusation of pro-choice groups regarding the value-laden language of the pro-life arguments. According to him, the pro-choice groups naively regard themselves as neutral or value-free:

The view that abortion... that the child... is not a human... that also results is some sort of belief. It is not a religious belief but is a sort of value. So both stances... I would even say that the stance that the child is not a human requires even more ideological belief. My stance is that if I don't know whether someone is a human or not, then for the sake of not being wrong I should not kill him.

(Zygmunt, individual interview, pro-life)

EMPHASISING THE SECULAR

The connection between this pro-life demonstration and the Catholic faith was very obvious. At the end of the demonstration, one man took off his hat and suggested that they make a small prayer before ending. He said a few short words, and everyone either stood in respectful silence or repeated the prayer before the demonstration ended.

(Participant observation, hospital vigil, January 2012)

During the pro-life demonstration, the inseparability between Catholicism and the pro-life movement seemed clear (Wojnicka and Pędziwiatr 2010). Despite the fact that my participant observations confirmed this religious aspect of the pro-life movement, the pro-life groups themselves played down the religious aspects of their activities. The argument posed by the pro-choice movement of an inherent and inseparable connection between the Church and the pro-life movement were dismissed by Aldona:

Catholic organisations do work with these matters of protecting life. But as I say I am convinced that the issue of protecting life is an issue of natural law. Our organisation is not a church organisation

(Aldona, individual interview, pro-life)

The organisation that Aldona worked with was, despite the prayers and the vigils held at the events that they organised, not officially connected to the Catholic Church. It shared offices, however, with a religious pro-life organisation. Upon my visit for the scheduled interview, I noted the posters in the entrance hall to both organisations with religious pictures and text. Similarly, upon entering into the office of Aldona's organisation, I noted several crosses and religious imagery along the walls. Aldona was firm about dissociating the organisation that she worked at from the institution of the Catholic Church. She went beyond disassociating the institutional space of the Church from the pro-life movement, emphasising the intrinsically secular nature of the organisation's pro-life values rooted in science:

Aldona: I think that this scientific discussion is already behind us. Biology and medicine has for long been speaking about how life starts from conception. What is made of this politically is another matter. In my case, it is not that I believe in a certain religion and the religion tells me that life starts from conception... it is just a simple fact, nature, that's all.

Kasia: So you would not say that the pro-life movement is Catholic?

Aldona: No. However there is an assumption... since the Catholic Church has in its doctrine the protection of all life from conception it is easy to connect these things. It is a matter of the natural law.

(Aldona, individual interview, pro-life)

In dubio, pro reo or *In dubit, for the accused* is a saying I came across during conversations with pro-life individuals and when reading the Catholic media (Kozłowska 2012). When I asked Aldona, a pro-life group organiser, about what to do in a setting of increased diversity of beliefs and potential clashes with the Catholic pro-life stance she answered with another, though similar, Latin sentence:

I can quote here a legal sentence, in Latin *in dubio pro vita humana* meaning 'in case of uncertainty, for human life'. So I am also not supportive of... I mean if we speak of a secular state then why should religion... be put above the secular knowledge? But if the natural law, that is facts and rational knowledge tells us that life starts from conception, then this protection should be provided.

(Aldona, individual interview, pro-life)

Even though I mainly traced the usage of this saying to pro-life religious web sites, to Aldona the term transcended divisions between the religious and the secular (Kozłowska 2012). Most of the pro-life activists personally identified with a Catholic religious tradition and were clear about the Church's pro-life teachings. Interestingly, the pro-life participants emphasised the secular 'nature' of the abortion conflict far more than they emphasised the religious basis for their strongly held values. With almost 95% of Poles identifying as Catholics (CBOS 2009), even if the meaning behind this large number is up for interpretation, this strategy can still be read as surprising. The Catholic teachings on sexual ethics, such as termination of pregnancy, seemed deprioritised in favour of an emphasis on a secular, rational, logical and natural justification for taking a pro-life position:

It does not come from my religious belief but from a feeling I have inside. Similarly like I think that theft or beating someone is something bad, I feel inside that abortion is something bad. And because I see them as people then the consequence is that I must... or for me at least the logical consequence is to think that it should be forbidden in all circumstances.

(Zygmunt, individual interview, pro-life)

In Zygmunt's narrative, his Catholic beliefs were divorced from the 'feeling' that he got inside about abortion being something 'bad'. In a similar vein, Aldona and Oskar prioritised a secular understanding of the abortion conflict, pointing to the secularity of her pro-life stance:

Surely faith has an influence on values but it is also to a large extent how we feel inside. Of course this is shaped through the Church, the media and the society you grow up in, but it is not only connected to faith. I know unbelievers who are against abortions and I know believers who support abortion.

(Zygmunt, individual interview, pro-life)

If we speak of a secular state then why should religion be put above secular knowledge? If the natural law, that is facts and rational knowledge, tells us that life starts from conception then this protection should be provided.

(Aldona, individual interview, pro-life)

Even if the Catholic arguments would not speak to me... more than anything it is the medical arguments that speak to me.

(Oskar, focus group, pro-life)

During a short focus group I conducted under a poster of an aborted foetus among a group of five pro-life participants they brought up their religion as a factor:

I also wanted to add that I am pro-life because I am a Catholic. Because my faith goes against killing unborn children and all other murders and when I see that the 6th commandment is broken... do not kill... then I want to oppose this.

(Julia, focus group, pro-life)

It is true, it [pro-life] is associated like that because the Church surely defends life, it is very strongly pro-life... the Church speaks out about these matters too. But to me pro-life is not necessarily... I mean its foundation can be religious but it absolutely does not have to be, I don't think that is necessary.

(Ava, individual interview, pro-life)

Like Ava, the rest of the pro-life participants identified as practising Catholics. Most of them, however, also separated their religious beliefs from their anti-abortion stance. This could be seen as an active strategy on behalf of the pro-life movement. Or, as an aim to reach beyond a religious audience by disconnecting from one

particular religious institution. Priest Boniecki⁷⁷ for example credits the presence of the Polish pro-choice in the public sphere among other things to:

‘a move away from a reduction of the issue of abortion to a religious category. It is more readable when understood through the category of natural law. This does not suggest ignoring the religious argument, but it protects from the error of treating respect for life in the same way as treating ordaining religious practices’ (Boniecki 2012).

The pro-life participants often spoke about a ‘Catholic bashing’ (focus groups with Catholic pro-life organisation) experienced by them in recent years. To Antoni, for example, it has become increasingly difficult to openly talk about one’s Catholicism.

In the past few years there is a... maybe bashing is the wrong word to use but there is something that is in the media regarded as an embarrassing topic, the trend has passed. That is how I feel... and I don’t have an example to give but since the death of John Paul... I read a lot of newspapers, I listen to radio and watch TV and the content has definitely changed. It is completely different and an element of some kind of atheism, to be left-wing, is today in fashion, it has become something normal. And what was Catholic, what was substantial and authoritative... that time passed.

(Antoni, focus group, pro-life)

The rise of non-religious views and lack of visible authority indicates a differentiation in the public sphere where Christianity, in this case Catholicism, becomes one of the possible options rather than the dominant belief (Taylor 2011b; Taylor 1999). Antoni’s equation of the fashionableness of the left-wing and the atheistic trend were also articulated by other Catholic pro-life participants:

Another important thing is that this is not only a case of religion or not-religion, rather it is more... well, abortion is bad because it is bad not because someone says... and this is a favourite left-wing thing to do, to attribute this view to religion and those who are not religious then say that because this a religious view it cannot be imposed on others. This is a trap and somewhat dishonest.

(Zygmunt, individual interview, pro-life)

⁷⁷ Priest Boniecki is the editor in chief of the Catholic *Tygodnik Powszechny* magazine. He represents the strand of ‘open Catholicism’ and has recently been banned from public expression outside of the space of his magazine as he was by the Church hierarchy judged to have acted not in accordance with Church teachings. The incident concerned Boniecki engaging in dialogue with an artist who burned the Bible on stage.

The pro-life participants also spoke about the ideological position of groups associated with the pro-choice movement, such as the liberal media, left-wing groups and feminists:

And this is not as much a matter of argument as it is a matter of ideology. Here the media have adopted certain assumptions, right, of a so called freedom, let's say, and they follow this assumption without even referring to logical justifications, because as science shows these [logical justifications] are supporting the pro-life statement.

(Olek, focus group, pro-life)

The empirical data presented above shows that both pro-life groups and pro-choice groups located their opponents in ideological and political assertions arguing that the other group's claims were divorced from rationality, logic and science. While the pro-life groups acknowledged that a protection of life could and was often associated with the Church due to its teaching on the protection of life and abortion, they rooted their own arguments and values in what they called natural law, rationality, logic and secular understanding based on medical and neutral knowledge. In contrast, they viewed the pro-choice arguments as part of larger leftist and gender ideologies that, according to them, were value-less or empty. Similarly, the pro-choice groups' main critique towards the pro-life arguments was their assumed inseparability to not only the teachings, but also the institution of the Polish Catholic Church that, according to them, dictated and imposed their religious views, controlling legislation, the public discourse and religious education. In contrast to this and similar to the claim of the pro-life groups, the pro-choice groups located their arguments in a scientific discourse.

Dichotomous divisions were prevalent amongst most participants yet their interruptions were crucial, pointing to the possibility of different narratives being allowed in, suggestive of curiosity and an openness to difference. Such divisions were nuanced in the narratives of Ava (pro-life Catholic feminist) and Amelia (pro-choice Catholic feminist). Ava was the one person that I interviewed from the pro-life movement whose arguments and views differed significantly from the other pro-life activists. Identifying as a feminist, she got in trouble with both feminist groups for being pro-life and pro-life groups for being a feminist. Ava's positionality presents certain parallels to Amelia's, the Catholic pro-choice feminist. Both were Catholics and feminists and were invested in broadening the understandings of these

concepts in their activism; Ava in pro-life and Amelia in pro-choice. Such a constellation, embodied by Amelia and Ava, presented an interruption to the strict division between feminist, secular pro-choice groups and Catholic pro-life groups that were often sceptical towards feminism. When asked about the religious aspect of the pro-life movement, so often brought up by pro-choice participants and equally often negated by the pro-life participants themselves despite their Catholic faith, Ava acknowledged the dichotomous divides:

Ava: There are a lot of [pro-life] initiatives... however to be honest there are few of them in Poland... but around the world there are a lot of initiatives that promote secular pro-life... there are pro-life pagans in the US. There is the Plagal so the Pro-life Alliance of Gays and Lesbians.

K: Really? That is interesting.

Ava: Yes there are all sorts of movements there [in the USA] that can be pro-life from pagans to all sorts of religious fractions to gay and lesbian circles.

K: And would you say that it is not similar in Poland?

A: No you can't see these things in Poland.

(Ava, individual interview, pro-life)

During my interview with pro-life feminist Ava, she broadened the pro-choice assumption of the Church being the headquarters of the pro-life and nuanced the convergences and divergences presented by the competing groups about obvious alliances. She did so by pointing to the diversity of the wider pro-life movement, including many different alliances, both religious and non-religious. In a similar manner, feminist and Catholic participant Amelia also broadened the assumptions on the other side of the battlefield; challenging ideas about the pro-choice movement being anti-religious and anti-clerical. As a believer, Amelia was part of the Catholic Church but also engaged in active dialogue about sexual ethics within it. Amelia herself collaborated with a pro-choice faith organisation in the USA. As will be elaborated on in the conclusion of this thesis that draws on both case studies from the perspective of conflict, dialogue and nurture of agonism, positions such as Ava's and Amelia's present the potential for the emergence of a hopeful space of dialogue, or even the possibility of the forging of political friendship (D. S. Allen 2006). This was not uncomplicated though. While nuancing the antagonisms presented in this chapter Ava and Amelia's cross-narrative work also suggested that

the overlaps and collaborations across the different groups primarily occurred at a broader transnational level and were much less likely to be found within the Polish abortion conflict.

CONCLUSION

This chapter looked at the way that the pro-life and pro-choice groups mobilised religious and secular narratives. It evidenced the central role of the idealised figures of the Polish Pope and Virgin Mary in upholding what was seen as traditional Polish Catholic values in support of a pro-life stance. Yet while all of the pro-life participants identified with a Catholic faith, they strongly emphasised the secular nature of their claims. Consequently, both groups mobilised narratives of rationality, nature and logic to underpin their stances, accusing their opponents of values infused by ideology as opposed to rationality.

While the Church's role in Polish abortion politics has been recognised in the literature (A. Kramer 2009; Heinen and Portet 2010; Titkow 1993) much less attention has been directed towards the role of secularism in abortion politics in Poland. Recent anti-clerical political currents as demonstrated by the emergence of the Palikot Movement⁷⁸ in 2010 have dramatically destabilised the Church's dominance with this newly established party quickly becoming a key player in the Polish political sphere (Grzywacz 2013).

⁷⁸ At the time of writing the name of the political party had changed its name to *Twoj Ruch* [Your Movement]

CHAPTER 9.

ABORTION POLITICS & THE WEST

INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at the role that the geographies of the West play in the Polish abortion conflict. It analyses these geographies both as embodied and imagined, looking at firstly; transnational collaborations of the pro-life and pro-choice groups and secondly; the ways in which the West was mobilised in the participants narratives.

The West, particularly Western Europe, is understood here as an imagined political community, an ideological construction that presumes a set of shared values (Benedict Anderson 1991; White 2000) that is deemed universal. This, in turn, hinges on certain practices of inclusion and exclusion, where Europe as part of the Western geography is placed in a position of superiority towards its peripheries. Poland's position and its relationship to the West is complicated and fascinating – contributing to a set of ambivalent geographies. The aim of this chapter is to understand how the abortion conflict in Warsaw speaks to this complex set of power relations between the West and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the ways in which these relationships affect how the conflict is played out nationally.

In order to tease out these debates this chapter draws on postcolonial theoretical perspectives applied to the CEE context (Kuus 2004; Lindelof 2001:Lindelof 2006; Boleslaw Domanski and Urban 2004; Korek 2009; Hagen 2003; Light and Young 2009; Cavanagh 2004; Stenning 2005; Thompson 2013) as well as literature that critically approaches the ways that sexual politics have been generally bound up with 'progressive' views mobilised in Western liberal narratives (Butler 2008; Puar 2007; Bracke 2012). This chapter also specifically examines literature set in the Polish context aiming to pluralise and problematise the dominant ideas on sexual politics and unveil the problematic Othering of CEE (Joanna Mizielinska and Kulpa 2011). I apply these literatures in order to draw out how the West is mobilised and resisted by the groups in my study and look at ways that this confirms or rejects certain notions about development and civilisational progress within CEE.

TRANSNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS

Transnational collaborations are here understood as networks mobilised through flows of discourses, resources and money (Valentine et al. 2013). This chapter focuses particularly on the flow of discourses between Polish and international groups and bodies.

PRO-LIFE TRANSNATIONAL COLLABORATION

The pro-life movement, seemingly mobilising narratives of Polishness as linked to the Polish Catholic tradition has been heavily influenced by American pro-life organisation *Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform* (CBR). During the 1990s the Polish movement described itself as weak, lacking capital and being demobilised, particularly in comparison to the stronger pro-choice movement (Dzierżawski 2012). A visit by the American pro-life activists to Poland has determined the current shape of the Polish movement leading to the Polish pro-life group's adoption of methods focusing on graphic imaginary. The ideas behind these strategies stem from previously successful campaigns in the US against the war in Vietnam as well as those instrumental in the American Civil Rights movement (Wojnicka and Pędziwiatr 2010). Aldona worked for one of the most active pro-life organisations in Poland that used the American images in their campaigns:

We mostly work with the Choose Life exhibitions⁷⁹ so we have got these posters from an organisation called Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform [CBR]. It is an American organisation and in the UK there is a website called something like Abort67 I think and they also show these posters. They [CBR] took the photos of those aborted babies and delivered them to us and so that is how we got these posters.

(Aldona, individual interview, pro-life)

The Polish pro-life movement adapted the original images from the USA to better represent Polish history. An image of a slave (see Figure G) was replaced by an image of Hitler (see Figure H). This campaign was inspired by the groups in the USA and is also used by British pro-life group Abort67 who also import images from the same American organisation (Jackson and Valentine 2014d).

⁷⁹ The Choose Life exhibitions are demonstrations with displays of graphic images of aborted fetuses. The organisation behind the images is the American pro-life organisation Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform or the CBR. The images get sent from the US to Polish and British pro-life groups to promote and display.



FIGURE G - 9.1 PRO-LIFE PROTEST, ANTI-SLAVERY THEME, UK
(COPYRIGHT: LUCY JACKSON 2012)



FIGURE H - 9.2 PRO-LIFE PROTEST, HITLER THEME, POLAND
(COPYRIGHT: KASIA NARKOWICZ 2011)

Not all of the pro-life activists I met supported this kind of transnational collaboration. At the fringes of the Polish pro-life movement was Ava who ran a small feminist pro-life group, mainly active in the virtual sphere. By identifying with pro-life and feminism, she challenged an established idea of pro-life activists and feminists as representing opposing camps. Ava distanced herself from the US-imported campaign methods and the Polish pro-life groups. Despite this her activism was also heavily reliant on exchanges with the USA. She emphasised her appreciation of the intellectual and material inspiration she took from a US-based online social site for the pro-life movement *Prolifebook*:

Ava: I write quite a lot on there, probably with huge mistakes which is really embarrassing for me. I translated a few of my texts from Polish to English. Recently someone sent me a book... I wrote 'hey did anyone read the book by Carol Everett', she was an abortionist, and then a man wrote to me that he will send the book to me. It is nice and generally they are very involved and I think that the discussions there are on quite a high level, really.

Kasia: And do you feel closer to that agenda then?

Ava: I think so, because I have never spoken on the topic of abortion like that with anyone in Poland. Pro-life is quite fossilised in Poland but I think pro-choice is also quite fossilised... I have to be active on American forums... There is also more freedom over there, Americans really have more freedom to express different opinions and be active... I don't know, US is a specific country with a large diversity.

(Ava, individual interview, pro-life)

Contrasting the 'fossilised' pro-life movement in Poland with the 'diversity', 'freedom' and 'higher level' she observed within the American pro-life movement, Ava mobilised civilisational rhetoric towards the Polish pro-life groups, embracing the American pro-life movement as closer to her own activism. Despite Ava's strong connection with them, she also understood her presence on the American online forums as 'embarrassing' due to her English language skills. Her involvement was thus mainly as a keen apprentice. The Polish pro-life engagement with the American pro-life movement materialised through exchange of ideas as well as exchanges of concrete campaign materials.

The pro-life participants emphasised that the collaborations with their American allies were not monetary and that the groups were sponsored using the private finances of their supporters (interviews with Aldona, Zygmunt and Ava). The movement did not engage in applications for EU grants or grants from Western European organisations as much as the pro-choice groups did. This they explained was due to the imbalance they perceived in financial opportunities where the obtainment of EU funding was understood to be more open to pro-choice groups than pro-life groups:

I think pro-choice groups have more opportunities due to the EU-related activities, they get more money, they can appeal to more diverse groups, academic groups and so on.

(Ava, individual interview, pro-life)

When Hungary devoted some EU funds to a campaign against abortion, then apparently one of the commissioners made a statement saying that it is not in accordance with European values, so this indicates something.

(Stefan, focus group, pro-life)

However the Polish pro-life groups did have the support of the Church. For example, one of the pro-life groups was an official youth group of the Catholic Church and activists collecting signatures under proposals for further restrictions to the abortion bill sometimes used the Church podiums as megaphones for airing their campaign messages, even if mainly symbolically.

PRO-CHOICE TRANSNATIONAL COLLABORATION

The pro-choice groups in Poland engaged with the international community in different ways to their pro-life counterparts. To them, exchanges of resources and ideas played an important role, particularly in the first years of the post-Communist democratisation during which the ban on abortion was introduced.

The Polish women's movement, of which the pro-choice movement was an integral part, has a long history of international collaboration. As part of the 1990s acceleration of global civil society (Keane 2003), particularly with the 1995 Beijing UN Women's Conference, women's movements around the world underwent what Alvarez (1998) refers to as an NGO-isation of the local civil society. Grabowska's (2009) doctorate thesis on Polish women's civil society and its complex relationship with the West has used the Latin American example employed by Alvarez (1998) showing similarities between it and the Polish case. Similarly to countries in Latin America, support from Western bodies towards Polish women's group accelerated around the Beijing Conference. The Polish women's groups were excited about being 'incorporated' within the geography of a global women's movement of which Beijing was an important milestone (Grabowska 2009). According to Basia, there was exchange of information both in English and Spanish, directed mainly towards South America because the situation there in some ways corresponded to the Polish women's civil society particularly with regards to abortion politics (Grabowska 2009). Basia argued they collaborated with the Polish groups because they were one of few places that were 'even worse off than we are'.

In the years following the democratisation processes when abortion was criminalised, international collaborations mattered for pro-choice groups. For example, the entrance of the Dutch organisation *Women on Waves* by sea in 2003 (explored in chapter 7) was the example most often quoted by my interviewees as significant for the international pro-choice collaboration. Other exchanges included

resource exchanges with pro-choice groups such as *Women on Web*⁸⁰ and invited lectures given by Western feminist scholars⁸¹.

The accession to the EU presented another opportunity for Polish feminism to further its international connections (Grabowska 2009). Roth (2007) argues that EU membership gave women's organisations in CEE better access to EU funding. Western funding worked as a guarantor for some groups' existence. It often meant that many projects could be initiated with successful campaigns, books published and even films produced, such as the acclaimed *The Underground Women's World*. Pro-choice participants talked of Western funding playing a major, if complicated, role in pro-choice projects, campaigns and initiatives. Research has pointed to an 'overwhelming dependence' on Western funds in the CEE countries (Orr 2008: 861). Alexandra Hrycak (2002) argues, in her study of post-soviet women's associations, that Western funding has had an overall negative effect on women's NGOs, causing competition, displacement of grassroots groups and ideological conflicts. Although Hrycak (2002) focussed mainly on Ukraine and the context cannot necessarily be directly translated to the Polish context, several of my interviews suggested similar issues occurring in Poland:

Gizela: You know what... gone is the time of campaigning, meaning this kind of activist actions.

Iga: Everyone wants to have a grant now...

Kasia: So when was this, the time of activism?

Gizela: I remember the year 2000...

Iga: Before the entrance to the EU, for sure...

Gizela: Before the entrance to the EU, yes.

Iga: You had to do more on your own initiative...

Gizela: There were fewer of us...but...

Iga: But it was a different structure of the financial organisation...

Kasia: So the activism slowed down with the entrance to the EU?

Iga: A bit yes...

⁸⁰ Women On Web is an online organisation providing resources for women to perform medical abortions at home

⁸¹ Professor Ann Snitow organised workshops for different feminist circles in Poland (Agnieszka, pro-choice).

(Gizela and Iga, paired interview, pro-choice)

The emergence of Western funding and the Beijing meeting was the start of what has slowly developed into a NGO-isation of the Polish pro-choice movement and what Escobar calls a developmentalisation of women (Escobar 1995). Some pro-choice participants referred to the consequences of a 'grant-fever' particularly after the 2004 EU expansion:

I will tell you honestly as a person who comes from the feminist movement, to me a big disappointment are the organisations, women's and feminist organisations. There is such a grant-fever right now... but also when I think back on the end of 1990s and beginning of 2000s, it was also like that, some organisations had more money than others but it was possible to run more campaigns together.

(Gizela, paired interview, pro-choice)

Amoore and Langley claim that the negative effects of an escalation of a global civil society, where actions become decentralised, is problematic as it intensifies power imbalances and distances grassroots organisations (2004). The arrival of Western donors had a professionalising impact on Polish women's grassroots pro-choice activism (Grabowska 2009). Grant-fever has been described as causing divisions between professionalised organisations that know how to access EU money and smaller grassroots groups that do not, resulting in divisions (Socha 2011).

COMPLICATED CONDITIONALITY

Some of the expectations of the Western grants were difficult to achieve for the Polish groups (see Kulpa 2012). On several occasions the grants have come from a Dutch organisation. Reflecting on the grant application process, pro-choice participant Karolina talked about how dependence of foreign funding meant a set of negotiations had to take place in order to satisfy the conditions set by the Western grant-givers within the local context in Poland:

They [granting body] find it important to support tolerance and work against homophobia and so they ask whether we have these people in our group. The questions are how many people in our group declared that they are representatives of the LGBT. They cannot imagine that this is a completely different perspective here, it is not like this in Poland. It is different if someone works for an organisation like *The Campaign Against Homophobia* because someone who is involved there is relaxed about it and declares their sexuality. But here it is not like this and it is not a norm either, that someone comes and declares that they are

homosexual or gay or lesbian. It varies but it is not a norm. And for them [granting body] this is obvious, how many of these people do you have in your group? So now explain in the grant application the differences! There is this gap.

(Karolina, focus group, pro-choice)

Merging the way things are done in Poland with the Dutch organisation's priorities felt awkward and out of place for Karolina. Despite the fact that her group had been working with the same organisation for years and subscribed to what Karolina saw were the progressive values of the Dutch organisation, the group still struggled to meet their expectations. This is partly because she recognised that there were differences rooted in the local realities of where the grant originated to where it was targeted:

There is a lot of subtleness that they don't get. For example, we are working with girls and boys, but they give grants only for girls. And the work me and a friend had to put in... had difficulties filling out the form... everywhere we had to write that it is only about women.

(Karolina, focus group, pro-choice)

Despite being familiar with both the grant giving organisation and the required EU language, Karolina still spent several hours talking through the grant application details with the NGO over Skype. The lack of subtleness in the understanding of the local context on the part of the donors meant that her group had to adapt to the priorities of their foreign funders rather than the local needs that they identified. As such, these issues echoed examples of disempowerment of local women's groups in Latin American countries due to Western-dictated funding (Alvarez 1998; Berger 2003), resulting in a lesser focus on the idea and more focus on the money (Socha 2011). Such a distraction caused by conditionality of the Dutch NGO is what Molyneux (2002) has broadly researched in the context of women's movements as a shift from the practical needs to strategic interests. Some groups however, have managed to navigate such complex relationships and 'use' foreign funding in positive ways. Reflecting back on her pro-choice activism, Maja argued that the Polish pro-choice movement adapted the Western funding to their local realities and context:

Western NGOs have been around since the beginning of the 1990s. So I do not see issues relating to the East-West relationship, protectionism, or the idea that we will tell you what to do. No, now I think this operates

on many different levels and it is more a cooperation. Now we know more or less how things work. Of course, we do want to observe how they have done it, extract lessons from their experiences but our standpoint is that we know best how to accommodate or adjust what we observe. Like you show us how you did it and we will take from it what we want. I haven't come across any agenda that would be very inapplicable to Polish circumstances.

(Maja, individual interview, pro-choice)

Eventually, however, membership of the EU complicated the access to funding. As Amelia, Łucja and Karolina demonstrate in the quotes below, obtaining grants became increasingly challenging for the pro-choice movement. Poland found itself in a complex position of in-betweenness:

We do not qualify for a lot of grants. We dropped out because we now form the group of the most wealthy nations. In the European Union only Poland, Ireland and Malta have such legislations. I think there is the assumption that there is State support.

(Amelia, individual interview, pro-choice)

When it comes to grants then it has become worse because before we were this so called developing country, or needy country, a beneficiary, who amongst others in the Eastern post-Communist bloc needed help. So the grants from the West were flowing straight into organisations, but now this help is filtered.

(Łucja, focus group, pro-choice)

Getting grants for work that we do is a growing problem. Because on the one hand the grants are being cut in Poland and on the other hand Poland has since a few years joined the countries that help developing countries... and before it was us that received the help, so then money was floating in more.

(Karolina, focus group, pro-choice)

Alina and Karolina exemplified a certain shift in a national and European imaginary that took place when Poland, a 'so called developing country' joined the EU, or as Alina phrased it; 'joined the countries that help developing countries'. As Karolina suggested, there was a certain expectation from the Western organisations that funded the pro-choice activities of a level of 'development' in Poland that had in fact not taken place. The assumptions of international organisations previously resourcing Polish pro-choice groups were that Poland having joined the EU should have reached 'at a different level'. Such assumptions made the work of the Polish pro-choice groups more difficult:

We have to work very hard to get a grant. We really need to fight hard for it... they [Dutch organisation] have got the impression that after so many years, since they know us since the very early years when we formed... something should have changed around here.

(Karolina, focus group, pro-choice)

In the interview with Catholic pro-choice feminist Amelia, she summarised what both Karolina and Łucja said:

When it comes to financial help it is now worse for organisations that work with reproductive rights since we entered the European Union. These organisations usually sustained themselves with the help of international grants because the Polish state does not really support projects that have to do with reproductive issues, and especially not connected to abortion. But the big grant making institutions now focus more on developing countries and it is more difficult to get grants for any such project, because there is the assumption that Poland is a Western European country where the Parliament supports such projects and such organisations because that is how it is in Western Europe.

(Amelia, individual interview, pro-choice)

When explaining the reasons behind the decreased international funding Amelia, Karolina and Łucja placed Poland outside of what they imagined to be Western Europe. As Łucja said, Poland was previously thought of as ‘this so called developing country’ and it is now, as Amelia continued ‘assumed’ to be a ‘Western, European country’. These discourses prompt further discussion on the effects of a postcolonial relationship between Poland and the West.

‘IF STRASBURG SAYS POLAND IS BAD, PEOPLE BELIEVE IT’

This section explores the less embodied transnational connections drawing out the ways in which opposing groups position themselves in relation to a broader imagined community of Europe and the West. Whether in relation to grants or campaign materials, both pro-choice and pro-life groups were on the receiving end of transactions with the West. The ways in which the opposing groups navigated this complex relationship to the West varied significantly. At the start of my fieldwork in Poland, I went to the European Women’s Congress, a Warsaw-based conference of women from all over the country, drawing together high-profile female figures from across the fields of politics, business, NGOs and academia. During one session, the leading pro-choice activist and politician Wanda Nowicka spoke on abortion, a topic rarely discussed in the annual Women’s Congress

gatherings. Nowicka emphasised partly the identification with Europe and partly Poland's distance from what she named the 'old Europe':

'Because we are gathered at a European Congress [of Women] I would like to talk about the [abortion] legislation in European countries. It seems that the old divisions between an 'old' Europe and a 'new' Europe are still valid. We, and I am speaking about Eastern Europe, we had the right to legal terminations of pregnancies... and in almost all European countries except in Poland there is still liberal legislation in place...Let's not forget about the solidarity between women in Europe, Polish women have the support of French women, American women and many other women. They write petitions and protest outside of embassies, they are helping Polish women (Nowicka 2011).

Remembering the legal right to abortion during Communist times, Nowicka (2011) pointed to the growth of a gap between CEE and Western European countries. Importantly, she emphasised the help that the Polish pro-choice movement gained from the West. Such 'help', while no doubt supportive, should be problematised within the uneven relationship of power within Europe (Kuus 2004). An example of such a problematic alliance is the 2011 petition to the Polish government by the European Women's Lobby⁸² (EWL 2011). During the 2011 pro-life campaign aiming to change the abortion law and make it more restrictive, the EWL issued a statement calling for Polish people to take action against the pro-life campaign by signing their petition. Their statement read: 'Send a letter today to the Polish Government to ensure that the Polish legislation does not limit women's reproductive rights!'⁸³ (EWL 2011). It further read:

It is *unacceptable* that in the *21st Century*, a European country includes in its legislation a provision which directly endangers women's lives. While Poland holds the EU Presidency, it is crucial that your country shows its commitment to promote gender equality and human rights, both through its own legislation and through its work at EU level... I trust that you will do your best to ensure Poland considers reviewing its legislation regarding abortion in a forward-looking light (EWL 2011).

Roth (2007) argues that the EWL, an umbrella organization of feminist and women's non-governmental organisations is an important player in the Polish abortion conflict. The EWL statement quoted above is an example of the

⁸² European Women's Lobby (EWL) is an umbrella organisation for women's association in the European Union, based in Brussels.

⁸³ Interestingly, exactly the same message was posted on the EWL website in petition to the Hungarian government, also emphasising the temporal condition of the 21st century.

employment of a certain civilisational discourse. Using language that emphasised Poland's lacking civilisational condition in 'the 21st century' the EWL encouraged its progress by urging it to be 'forward-looking', as 'a European country'. The EWL emphasised a division between the expectations of a European, progressive country in the 21st century and the Polish lack of conformation to the civilised world (Todorova 2009). The achievement of a transition was closely understood in the categories of progress and the adoption of 'Western values' that have a universal validity. This is the point that this thesis critiques (Chakrabarty 2000). Drawing on Butler (2008), Puar (2007) and Brown (2006), Poland's civilisation was by the EWL judged by its level of sexual emancipation.

A requirement for the cultivation of a shared European identity is, according to White, an ideological project that requires homogenisation of difference (White 2000). This suggests a certain superiority of what is understood to be the 'essence' of a European identity. As White (2000) argues, the European imagined community aims to assimilate those who bring in un-European traditions such as, in this case, illegal abortion. These complexities are illustrated through the example of one of the Polish abortion cases heard at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasburg. Abortion cases that end up being discussed by international organisations, such as the one of Alicja Tysiac⁸⁴, are important to the pro-choice movement:

Jagoda: Alicja is a flag, she has succeeded, she made it, she got granted the right. But of course for the pro-life movement it is also a flag that they can wave around saying it was only about money for her. Would she not have won there, or if this case would not have happened, than the pro-choice movement would have lost a lot as well.

Aneta: And for common citizens... it is a main flow of information... I don't know how to call it, it is something very reliable. And if Strasburg says something, that Poland is bad and it should be different, I think that people care about it, and they also say that. This is very significant.

Jagoda: Yes.

Kasia: Because it is part of EU you think or?

Jagoda: ... she achieved everything there and was granted the right.

⁸⁴ Alicja Tysiac is a Polish woman that upon not getting granted legal abortion due to health issues sued Poland in the European Human Rights Court (Tysiac v. Poland, Application no. 5410/03) and won the case. She has since been active in the pro-choice movement.

Aneta: Somehow... Polish people believe in it, I think.

(Aneta & Jagoda, paired interview, pro-choice)

The sense that ‘if Strasburg says Poland is bad, people believe it’ suggested a moral superiority of Western European international organisations. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) together with other international institutions such as the European Union (EU) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) were hailed as credible and gave a sense of achievement at the highest authority as evidenced in both Aneta’s and Jagoda’s narratives. Yet, as Kulpa (2013) argues in the case of the Polish LGBT groups, European Parliament resolutions can have a contradictory effect too. The ECHR verdict⁸⁵ in the Tysiac case emphasised: a ‘deep concern regarding the State Party’s restrictive abortion law’ and ‘advised Poland to liberalise its legislation and practice on abortion’ (Zampas and Gher 2008). Such a ‘telling off’ is here understood to be entangled within wider geographies of power in CEE. This reflects broader tensions that the Eastern enlargement of the European Union involved. These tensions speak to the weight to assign to EU norms and values in comparison to the practices and laws of individual member-states (Liebert 2007), which, at least in the case of Poland, differed from those of Western Europe with regards to sexual ethics. Polish pro-choice groups employ a similarly troubling discourse towards Poland and Polish pro-life groups:

We are still educating people on the basics. Really basics. Do not throw garbage, do not hit your wife...there are too few women in the public sphere... we need to educate children about their sexuality, gay is also a human being, this is really very basic. And all of these social campaigns are happening at the same time, right, they are happening now! We are educating this society still and we cannot expect too much... , the media and the Church are doing a bad job, as they do not take upon the role of shaping culture but they are going backwards.

(Maja, individual interview, pro-choice)

Accounts such as the one above, where a pro-choice participant places Polish society on a trajectory to Enlightenment, are common and confirm what has been critiqued as reducing Poland to a state of transition (Stenning 2005). Some of the pro-choice groups, when speaking of their encounters with the wider society outside of the pro-choice movement, suggest that a ‘civilising mission’ bestowed upon Poland and supposedly initiated by its members is failing:

⁸⁵ (HRC Poland, supra n. 46.)

The assumption is that we [the Polish society] are opening up and we want to be enlightened, but on the other side no... no.

(Magda, individual interview, pro-choice)

I think there is a conviction that it [pro-life] is basically backwards, that they are some Catholic fundamentalists.

(Jagoda, paired interview, pro-choice)

Employment of civilisational narratives was critiqued by the pro-life participants in this study. Talking about the pro-choice movement, the pro-life group's complained of their opponents patronising attitude:

Marcelina: I noticed that they often attack and say for example how uneducated we are... backwards even, that we got no contact with the world, with the West because there it is completely different and we still remain here in our superstitious world that we don't walk to come out of...

Szymon: And this not as much a matter of argument as it is a matter of ideology.

(Marcelina and Szymon, focus group, pro-life)

The verdict [of the ECHR] was used in the context that this was the European Union, and that the Human Rights Court in Strasburg suggested that abortion should be legal. And that if we don't want it here in Poland then it must mean we are backward, not European... I didn't like it, the context, I don't agree with it. If anyone is of a different opinion they [pro-choice] think he [sic!] is backwards. And on top of this there is the fact that Poland is from the former Eastern bloc and joined the European Union later... so they can explain our backwardness and why that is... It is a bit like that, the left-wing circles are certain that the views that they are proclaiming are very progressive and modern however these views have been around for thousands of years. Children were being killed among Ancient Spartans so it is nothing new.

(Zygmunt, individual interview, pro-life)

A few weeks ago I was at a lecture about education in Europe and we started with the roots, which is the Spartan education. And there was a practice then that the newborns were left for three days and those of them that after those three days looked healthy were left because they would later serve as warriors in the army. People often say that in-vitro fertilisation, contraception, abortion is something super progressive, that we are now so modern and trendy and all. But in many aspects this is going backwards not meaning to use words like barbarity, but that's how it looks.

(Kaja, focus group, pro-life)

The pro-life narratives could point to a certain countering of hegemonic Western civilisational narratives. However, the pro-life participants also revealed a certain sense of moral superiority against the pro-choice groups. For a Catholic pro-life group, membership of the EU brought with it so called ‘anti-values’:

Stefan: The EU brings with it a certain set of values, or according to our categories these are rather anti-values.

Fabian: That is right, the EU somehow brought with itself anti-values, just like Stefan nicely put it. This has been happening in the West for a long time now, such anti-values like pro-choice and rights to your own belly and so on.

Liliana: When it comes to the EU or Europe or even just Western countries, so called rich countries of northern Europe, the West, they all changed the meanings of words like rights and human rights.

(Focus group, pro-life)

So I don’t know if there is a lower level of education there [in the UK] because it is often said that... here we learn this in biology classes, I remember it was in the 4th grade... On several occasions there were Swedish journalists coming here to interview us and you could see in their faces that... they did not understand... I mean overall the conversation was nice but you could see that they are unable to understand what we are talking about. It has been so obvious for them for years and it has changed to this degree that it would be like trying to convince someone that the sky is green.

(Aldona, individual interview, pro-life)

In a study of the main pro-life group, Wojnicka and Pedziwiatr (2010:21) pointed to the international scope of pro-life activism, emphasising the ‘lack of awareness’ in ‘the whole Western world where the situation is just horrible’. The missionary attitude of the Polish pro-life movement was evident in the way they spoke about the West and the dominating attitude towards abortion that they found problematic. The pro-life group’s representatives expressed a sense of a global mission to spread pro-life values to counter what they regarded as ‘anti-values’ dominating the West and being adopted by the left-leaning pro-choice groups.

Pro-life feminist Ava spoke of the recent pro-choice film, *Underground Women’s State*, made by Polish pro-choice activists with Western funds. Ava told me that the English version of the trailer was patronising and played into international public opinion to present Poland in the worst possible light:

They are really like, Poland is a third-world country, a backward country where women lack basic rights and so on. I think that someone who sees this and who does not have a clue where [Poland] is and what kind of a European country it is, really imagines a reality that is terrifying, like women massively dying on the streets and not being able to receive any medical care. And pro-choice groups certainly play on this in front of international opinion.

(Ava, individual interview, pro-life)

Before concluding I want to tie together the narratives in this section that point to an unequal power relationship between Poland and the category of the West that is employed both as an educator, moral superior (pro-choice) and value-less imposer (pro-life). Situating these narratives within postcolonial theory lends to a framing of the conflict through the imagined geographies of Poland and the West.

In this chapter, pro-life Ava talked enthusiastically about her engagement with American pro-life activists yet mainly learning from them, embarrassed by her inability to speak their language fluently. There was disappointment expressed by Ava, Gizela, Maja, Aneta and Jagoda and many others about Poland 'not yet' being a properly European country or not being sufficiently developed. To them, the work was about educating and enlightening Poland about 'the basics'. For the pro-choice groups, the West was often stereotyped as a progressive category, an ideal to learn from and to look towards. The pro-life groups more often stereotyped the West as the oppressive imposer of anti-values, rules and norms. There were of course cracks in these essentialised representations. Yet, the principal representation of the West by pro-life and pro-choice groups actualised established stereotypical dichotomies between Western Europe and the CEE. As such, the groups emphasised the uneven power relationship that the participants experienced in relation to the American and Western European organisations.

As Stuart Hall (1997) argues, stereotyping takes place in contexts where there already is a power imbalance present. The stereotyping of the West contributed to sustaining certain stereotypes of Poland. Practices of representation contribute to a production of knowledge about the Other (Hall 1997). Orientalism towards CEE was seen to have been employed to freeze Poland as part of this region in a perceived permanent stage of transition (Lindelof 2006, Stenning 2005). In this dichotomous representation, 'old' Europe makes the rules and 'new' Europe as the

post-Communist countries are often referred to, is expected to adjust (Lindelof 2006). This asymmetric power relationship between the two worlds perpetuates the existing stereotypes of the regions thereby limiting the production of more nuanced ideas of both categories that of the West and that of CEE. The aim of this chapter was to map the representations of the West as used by the conflicting groups, however stereotyped, as this mapping can then function as a starting point for thinking through more nuanced ways in which to approach conflicted sites such as abortion politics.

CONCLUSION

This chapter looked at the role played by collaborations and funding relationships between Polish groups and Western based organisations in influencing the work and discourses of pro-life and pro-choice groups in Poland. It focussed particularly on the effects of EU governmentality and its consequences for sexual politics on the ground. Particular attention was devoted to how the geography of the West was imagined by the groups.

The international community, materialised through non-governmental organisations and institutional bodies such as the European Union, turned out to be simultaneously a reservoir of funding, a major influence on the agendas of the groups and a problematic source of NGO-isation. These relationships sustained a complicated dependency and reinforced dichotomous power relationships between Poland and the West. The relationship with the international community revealed a significant appropriation of what was imagined as the West by both groups as a category to both aspire to and learn from as well as to reject and challenge.

In more detail, my empirical evidence suggests that while both pro-life and pro-choice groups engaged in international collaborations in significant ways, the nature of engagements with international groups varied between them. Pro-choice groups engaged with the international community in a more professionalised way, mainly through obtaining Western European grants for pro-choice projects, publications and events. Here, my data contributes to broader studies on the women's movements both in Central and Eastern Europe (Roth 2007; Orr 2008; Hrycak 2002) and in Latin American countries (Alvarez 1998; Berger 2003) where certain concerns, such as the complicated relationship with Western funding, overlap.

While some pro-choice groups sustained themselves mainly through Western funding, the pro-life participants talked less of economic capital⁸⁶ and more of intellectual capital and resources, provided by pro-life groups mainly those based in the United States. However, what was obvious during the fieldwork was the engagement and close pro-life reliance on the institution of the Catholic Church.

Despite the differences in the way that the groups engaged with Western groups and discourses, the transnational collaborations were predominantly one-sided. The international ‘collaborations’ in most cases placed both the Polish pro-life and pro-choice movements as recipients of Western capital; in different forms including American campaign material and European grants. Despite some examples of mutual exchange at international seminars and workshops, in most cases engagement with the West pointed to a relationship of giver and beneficiary. Uneven relationships were further emphasised by the centrality of a civilisational rhetoric at the centre of sexual politics (see Bracke 2012). This only aggravated the already wide gap between the groups; as one group was identified with the enlightened West while the other with traditional Catholic Poland.

⁸⁶ An important insertion here, however, is that the answers to the ways that the groups engaged transnationally are drawn entirely from the primary empirical data I have gathered when I asked during the interviews about the way they sustain themselves or about their collaborations with the West. I have relied on what the participants have told me and have not tracked the funding and official collaborations as it was outside of the scope of my work.

CHAPTER 10.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to advance knowledge about conflicts over religious and sexual politics in the public sphere through closely investigating two case studies simultaneously played out in the Polish public sphere. Further, with this thesis I aimed to map key narratives mobilised by the conflicted groups and approach them from post-colonial and post-secular perspectives. The thesis put forward questions about how religious and sexual politics were mobilised in public spaces, to what extent the groups involved relied on secular narratives, how imagined categories of the West were constituted, and finally, what possibilities there existed for fostering alliances beyond antagonisms.

KEY FINDINGS

Chapters 4 & 7 of the respective case studies evidenced a shift in the way that the conflicts were played out in and through public space. The implications of these findings across the two case studies suggest that the way the group conflicts over religious and sexual politics were mobilised has undergone changes that not only jeopardised possibilities for dialogue between opposing groups but also fostered antagonistic politics, consequently threatening a pluralistic public sphere and breaking with the historical trajectories of the conflicts.

The opposition to the construction of two mosques in the Polish capital was a break with a longstanding history of uncontested mosque presence in the architectural landscape of Poland. This demonstrated a shift in the way that mosque politics were played out in public space. In the Włochy neighbourhood the local opposition revealed deeply seated tensions concerning the broader geographies of Warsaw where the mosque was just one of many new developments in the old neighbourhood. Consequently I have shown that the claims of the mosque's ill-fit in the locale were inseparable from understandings of the entangled local geographies. These findings do not indicate, however, that mosque objections based on spatial concerns such as lack of parking space or the noise from the azan are delinked from Islamophobia. On the contrary, the increasingly Islamophobic atmosphere in the country was leveraged by the local residents to successfully petition against the new

construction in their neighbourhood. These tensions in Warsaw closely mirrored those observed in mosque conflicts in Western countries such as the Netherlands (Tamimi Arab 2012), the UK (Gale 2005; McLoughlin 2005), Australia (K. Dunn 2001), Germany (Jonker 2005; T. Schmitt 2012) and Italy (Saint-Blancat and Schmidt di Friedberg 2005). By studying this recent phenomenon in Poland this thesis has contributed to extending the Western focus of existing research on mosque conflicts to the CEE region.

Similarly, group politics around abortion evidenced a gradual withdrawal of the historically prominent presence of pro-choice groups from the Polish public sphere. My findings indicate a stark gender divide where male dominated pro-life groups were increasingly visible in the public sphere at the expense of female dominated pro-choice activists who to a large extent had vacated the public sphere. The findings showed that this withdrawal was partly due to a fear of violence, resulting in women's pro-choice groups instead embracing the safer space of online activism, and hence being largely confined to the virtual sphere. The study evidenced that at crucial times the lack of a physical presence on the streets hindered the democratic participation of the feminist pro-choice movement.

Chapters 5 & 9 investigated how imagined geographies of Western and Central and Eastern Europe were mobilised in both case studies. Analysing the findings using insights from postcolonial theory the study found that the West/CEE dichotomy was employed by secularist, Catholic and feminist groups in both conflicts. By relying on civilisational discourses about each other the groups mobilised the imagined political geography of the West as a measurement of their opponent's civilisational progress.

In the mosque case study this was evidenced in the employment of feminist discourses deeming Islam as oppressive to women. The rights of women were superficially elevated in problematic alliances between feminist and right wing groups that served to exclude Muslims from an imagined European community. The hijab functioned as a symbolic issue for these groups, who saw it both as oppressive and simultaneously as threatening.

Such findings, although a new phenomenon in the Polish context, are reminiscent of tired Western European tropes used against Islam. Such narratives were entertained

by all of the non-Muslim participants in this study, even those positive towards Islam. This suggested that ‘narratives of exceptionalism’ (see Puar 2007) were being employed, where issues around gender politics within Poland were suspended in order to define Muslims as Europe’s Others.

In the second case study, the West functioned as a key player in a complex web of power relationships. This was exemplified by the EU initiatives such as the European Human Rights Court cases and the European Women’s Lobby petition chiding Poland for its backwardness and urging Poland to enter the 21st century. The prominence with which the West was mobilised by the participants showed a complicated dependency that seemingly legitimised the dichotomous power relationship between Poland and an imagined political category of a superior West as articulated through EU governmentality.

These findings across both case studies are particularly interesting in the context of a study on Poland, a country that has historically been at the periphery of the West and seems to be perpetually locked in a position of ‘catching up’ with Western Europe. An uncritical adoption of civilisational narratives around progress, rationality and universality can be read as a desperate attempt to close the gap with Western Europe, an ambition that has haunted Poland and the wider CEE region for decades.

Chapters 6 & 8 evidenced and subsequently challenged the reliance on hegemonic secularism by the conflicting groups. In the mosque case study Islam’s role in the public sphere was opposed through a fundamentalist secularism that seemed blind to the prominent presence of Catholicism in the Polish public sphere. Again narratives of exceptionalism appeared to be mobilised in the Islamophobic discourse in Poland. Polish secularists delighted in their use of caricatures to deem Muslims as illiberal and violent in a triumphant expression of their freedom of speech. Issues around Islamophobia and racism were expected to play second fiddle to the overarching importance of upholding such European liberal freedoms, particularly in a climate where the idea of what constitutes Europe was perceived by them to be threatened by its Muslim Others.

The elevation of secular rationalism as dichotomously opposed to religious ideology was also evident in the second case study where both pro-life and pro-choice groups

appealed to secular arguments in support of their respective positions. Both groups employed civilisational narratives accusing their opponents of holding ideological and hence, they argued, irrational positions.

In the midst of these antagonisms, however, both conflicts evidenced traces of spaces of hope emerging among the conflicting groups. When understanding and convergence was sought through shared histories and beliefs, particularly between the Christians and the Muslims, it pointed to possibilities of political friendships. This was primarily evidenced in the way in which narratives of understanding and curiosity were mobilised between the groups. Yet it is imperative to note here that these spaces of hope were fragile and in order to foster agonistic politics, they need to be nurtured through time with a focus away from the more limiting secular framework.

Tying together these findings, I consider it imperative to look critically towards the entangled discourses of secularism and the West that were mobilised by the groups. A particularly pressing set of questions that emerge from these findings concern the wider impact of these hegemonic narratives on group conflicts in the Polish public sphere. The impact of such narratives on limiting the possibility for political friendships to develop and their role in casting conflict in antagonistic terms has been observed in my study.

I argue that narratives of Western moral and civilisational superiority are readily adopted in Poland due to its longstanding position in the imaginary waiting room of Western Europe. This has had profound effects on how conflicts in the Polish public sphere have played out. This study has found an unprecedented rise of secular Islamophobia in Poland mobilised in and through conflicts over mosque constructions. The findings show that civilisational narratives employed by mosque opponents towards Muslims and Islam go against Islam's genealogy in Poland where mosques have for centuries formed an integral part of the national landscape. The mosque opposition mobilised narratives that echoed global antagonisms between the West and Islam, pitting Western liberal secular values rooted in a tradition of Enlightenment against its putatively fundamentalist Islamic Other. Civilisational narratives around progress and rationality were also prominent in the abortion case study where feminist groups closely aligned themselves with Western

European governmentality as the arbiter of Polish civilisational progress in the arena of sexual politics.

This study has evidenced that hegemonic narratives of Western civilisation and secularism have fuelled antagonisms between the secularist, Catholic and Muslim groups and it has further suggested a lack of engagement in these conflicts with the specifics of the Polish context. I have identified a need to ask more rigorous questions regarding the effects of Poland's postcolonial condition on the conflicts played out in the Polish public sphere. This requires a rethinking of Poland's relationship to the imagined geography of the West. I argue that there is a need for Polish society to reflect upon its own history in order to recast antagonisms as agonism allowing for the different groups within the society to truly live in difference.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The theoretical contribution of this thesis sits at the intersection of political theory on the public sphere and work on post-secularism and post-coloniality. Within this constellation, I have looked to theories that challenge a persistent view of consensus and universal agreement in a contested public sphere, and concluded that such views lead to antagonisms. Through the application of theories on agonism and political friendships I have instead argued that a more hopeful way to analyse tensions in the public sphere is to look towards difference rather than universality. This has required me to address limitations in the geographical work on the post-secular that in my view relies too heavily on Habermasian notions of a secular liberal public sphere and in so doing risks excluding difference entirely. Instead, I have argued that there is a crucial unmet need to develop a post-secular approach where hegemonic secularism is challenged. Such an approach would mean that religious voices would not only to be heard as 'special guests' but instead form permanent and non-reformed features of a differentiated public sphere. Only then, I argue, can 'the critique of fundamentalism within secularism' have true traction.

Furthermore, I have added to the post-colonial literature on CEE through showing how an application of postcolonial theory challenges some of the Polish discourses that contribute to the aforementioned antagonisms. This was particularly evident in the reliance on liberal secularist notions of the public sphere and the ways in which

feminist and colonial narratives were mobilised in a context where they were not readily familiar. As has been discussed in this thesis the collusion between liberal values and racism is not a new phenomenon. It can be argued that it is with reluctance that scholarship in the West has tended to its own backyard, often considering liberalism's engagement with Islamophobia as a 'strange alliance'. Scholarship that has critically approached the universalistic character of a liberal public sphere and interrogated the sanctioning of Islamophobia within a liberal framework (Butler 2008; Brown 2006; Puar 2007) has been confined to the West and focussed on national settings such as the Netherlands and the USA. Following in the footsteps of such scholarship, this study contributes original empirical material that advances academic knowledge by bringing to the table a perspective from outside the core geographies of the West.

Methodologically, this thesis collects original knowledge about working with and across groups in conflict. Engagement with participants that were in conflict with each other and, not least, with me as a researcher contributed to original insights regarding the challenges of balancing a complex research field. In response to these challenges I have reflected critically on the various complex positionalities that I brought into the groups and the ways that this affected trust and access to participants. In this way the thesis contributes to feminist-inspired literature that takes into consideration the researcher's own fragile and shifting position.

BEYOND ANTAGONISMS

I want to end this thesis with a quote from Jerzy Turowicz, a former editor of the leading Catholic magazine *Tygodnik Powszechny*. In reflecting on the tensions around religion and secularism, he summarises a central sentiment that has accompanied this study; one that encompasses compromise, trust and dialogue in order to facilitate a public sphere not void of conflict but recognising the necessary roles of compromise and sacrifice that are needed to foster alliances and political friendships:

An open stance is necessary, dialogue, also with the opponents...

Here, reaching compromises is key.

Jerzy Turowicz [1997] (2013), *my translation*)

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APPENDIX



Meczet na Ochocie? Jaka jest twoja opinia?

Uniwersytet w Leeds zaprasza mieszkańców Ochoty do wzięcia udziału w spotkaniu, podczas którego porozmawiamy o rosnącej różnorodności religijnej na Ochocie w kontekście powstania Ośrodka Kultury Muzułmańskiej przy rondzie Zesłańców Syberyjskich.

Dyskusja będzie trwała 1 godzinę, zaproszonych zostanie ok. 4-8 uczestników. Spotkanie organizowane jest w ramach programu badawczego *Życie w Różnorodności* prowadzonego na Uniwersytecie w Leeds (Anglia) a finansowanego z Europejskiej Rady ds. Badań Naukowych.

***Każdy uczestnik otrzyma wynagrodzenie
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Osoby zainteresowane udziałem w spotkaniu prosimy o kontakt z **Kasią Narkowicz**: gykn@leeds.ac.uk lub 792 830 192

<http://www.geog.leeds.ac.uk/projects/livedifference/>