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GRZEGORZ PIOTROWSKI
University of Gdansk

MAGDALENA MUSZEL
University of Gdansk

Bridging Borders, Breaking Barriers: Gender Politics and Polish Migrant Activism in the UK

Abstract: Migrant activism, particularly of Polish migrants in the UK, is a dynamic and interesting area in which to exploring intersections of social movement theory, politics, and global communication. This article examines the role of "transmigrants"—individuals who maintain ties to their home countries while living abroad. Our analysis especially focuses on the growing political activism of Polish migrants, with an emphasis on women's and feminist movements, because socio-political changes in Poland after 2015 and enhanced communication have intensified the impact of such migrant activism across Europe. Global women's rights movements and the intersectional, inclusive nature of contemporary activism have become crucial unifying forces and produced transnational solidarity for women facing widespread gender discrimination. Our findings indicate that while Polish migrant activism has been influenced by Poland's political context, the post-Brexit situation has also led to broader challenges for migrants, with concomitant deeper political integration and engagement in the UK. Furthermore, this article discusses the shift in transnational political remittances from grassroots activism to a more collaborative, mainstream approach. Drawing on networks established during the COVID-19 pandemic, the shift has been crucial in addressing post-Brexit legal challenges. While there are similarities between feminist activism in the UK and Poland, migrant communities have demonstrated their adaptability and resilience by introducing unique strategies and alliances in the overseas context.

Keywords: feminism, migration, activism

Introduction

The wave of women's protests and strikes in Poland in 2016 marked a pivotal point for Polish feminism. The protests were notable not only for their broad geographical spread—reaching even small towns (Piotrowski & Muszel 2018)—but also for their innovative use of strike tactics in what was not a traditional labor dispute (Kubisa & Rakowska 2018) and for their role in shaping gendered concepts of citizenship and public engagement (Kowalska & Nawojski 2019). These protests revealed a significant generational shift. The increasingly active role of younger cohorts reflected broader global trends in the women's movement (Chironi 2019). The generational involvement in feminist activism has coincided with another notable demographic trend: emigration. In Poland, emigration, particularly to the UK and Ireland, has been driven by both economic and political disillusionment, especially after 2015 (Garapich 2016). The involvement of Polish emigrants in political

and feminist activism highlights the complex intersections of migration and transnational political engagement (Erel 2010; Levitt & Schiller 2004).

The October 2020 protests further highlighted these dynamics, with large crowds in Poland and across the globe protesting the Constitutional Court's restrictive abortion ruling, and with the UK becoming a prominent site for diaspora-led protests. These protests have exemplified the transnational nature of modern feminist movements, particularly among migrant communities, where political and social activism often crosses national borders. This study is in line with broader research on political engagement among migrants and explores how feminist activism in Poland has influenced and been influenced by Polish feminist activists in the UK.

While existing research has explored the phenomenon of Polish feminist activism, particularly within the context of the Black Protest (Graff & Korolczuk 2022; Graff 2020; Korolczuk et al. 2019; Hall 2019; Muszel & Piotrowski 2022a), the role of migrants in shaping these movements remains underexplored. This article aims to fill the gap by focusing on the unique experiences of Polish feminist activists in the UK and investigating their collaboration with local UK organizations, their interactions with counter-movements, and their strategies for navigating the distinct socio-political environments of both their home and host countries. In doing so, the article contributes to the growing body of literature on transnational political remittances, understood as the transmission of political ideas, values, and practices by migrants across borders (Levitt 1998; Boccagni 2017; Krawatzek & Müller-Funk 2020; Ullah et al. 2024).

The 2016 and 2020 protests not only had a profound impact within Poland but also attracted international attention. This led to the formation of distinct diasporic networks that facilitate both the mobilization of activists and the dissemination of feminist ideals across borders (Elgenius 2017). The case of Polish activists in the UK is particularly significant given the complexity of the post-Brexit environment.

This article is structured as follows: first, it discusses the theoretical framework for the analysis, which draws on the concepts of transnationalism, transnational political action, and political remittances (Bauböck 2003; Faist 2010). It then provides a historical overview of reproductive rights in Poland since the late 1980s and contextualizes the emergence and evolution of the current feminist movement, in which reproductive rights have been the key topic since 2016. The article then also examines the history of Polish migration to the UK, with a focus on the period after Poland's accession to the EU in 2004, the profound impact of accession on the Polish community, and the key role of migrant networks in fostering social and political engagement. Subsequently, the empirical data collected from qualitative fieldwork conducted among Polish feminist activists in the UK is analyzed, with particular attention paid to the role of transnational networks in facilitating activism. In conclusion, the article synthesizes the findings and offers insights into the ways in which transnational feminist activism among Polish migrants in the UK has evolved in response to both Polish political developments and the changing political landscape in the UK after Brexit. It argues that this form of activism represents a significant and understudied dimension of both the Polish feminist movement and broader transnational feminist networks, with important implications for understanding how migrants contribute to political and social change across borders.

A key contextual factor influencing the development of these groups in the UK is the interplay between the diaspora community and politics in the host country—an interplay that was particularly influenced by the 2015 election victory of the Law and Justice Party (PiS) in Poland. This rightwing government's policies against women have sparked protests and had a significant impact on both domestic and diaspora activism, while Brexit has affected the life of migrants in the UK. These events formed critical junctures.

The emergence and evolution of the Polish reproductive rights movement in the UK since 2016 exemplifies transnational political engagement, which is deeply connected to both origin and host societies. A key research question is how this transnational engagement is simultaneously embedded in both Polish and British contexts.

Theory

Given the dynamics of contemporary migration movements, the transnational political and public participation of migrants who are active in both their countries of residence and their countries of origin is an important topic for social scientists. Historically, until the 1970s, migrants in Western Europe were considered passive in the social and political spheres of their new countries. This perception changed due to settlement processes and the arrival of subsequent generations, leading to more permanent integration and expanded rights (Doomernik, Bruquetas-Callejo 2016). As a result, the involvement of migrants in the political and public spheres increased, and migrants often now engage in more than one political community. The concepts of transnationalism and transnational communities, which reflect complex forms of belonging and activity during mass migration, have been studied extensively (Bauböck 2003; Bauböck, Faist 2010; Schiller et al. 1992). Transnational migrants create a unique social, cultural, political, and economic world by maintaining ties across national boundaries and using these ties to act as conduits between nations (Koopmans et al. 2005: 109). In order to participate in transnational political action, migrants require formal and legal channels (Chaudhary, Moss 2019). Political transnationalism refers to political activities in transnational spaces (Itzigsohn, Villacrés 2008) and can include different forms such as political remittances. These remittances, which go beyond social remittances, position migrants as agents of change who influence their countries of origin with new behaviors, ideas, and innovations (Levitt 1998). Political remittances can manifest as electoral participation, leadership roles upon return, financial support for political entities, or involvement in political processes in the country of origin (Krawatzek, Müller-Funk 2019; Kessler, Rother 2016; Tabar 2014).

Given that large numbers of people migrated after 2004, we use the concept of transnational political action (TPA) and a typology based on the degree of institutionalization and politicization of migrants to analyze these phenomena.

In fact, the transnational political action of migrants is likely to fall into more than one type, and a group's activities may become more or less institutionalized and overtly political over time. Thus, as Chaudhary et al. point out, this typology is intended to serve as a heuristic tool to address the different types of transnational political action of interest to researchers in related fields (Chaudhary et al. 2019).

Table 1

	Less institutionalized	More institutionalized
Explicitly political claims/goals	Establishing social movement groups; holding protest events and fundraisers for political causes and entities	Voting and participating in party politics in the home country; lobbying the host-country on foreign policy; forming social movement organizations; institutional support for insurgencies or guerilla groups
Implicitly political claims/goals	Ad hoc fundraising for humanitarian emergencies; delivering aid in person, contributing to reconstruction efforts	Establishing development and relief organizations, such as hometown associations (HTAs)

A.R. Chaudhary, D.M. Moss (2019).

The demands of Polish women's movements in regard to reproductive rights have produced transnational political action and intense political remittances around the world. These have taken the form of organizing and actively participating in protests and activities supporting the struggle for reproductive rights in Poland after 2016.

A Brief History of Abortion Struggles in Poland

The discourse on reproductive rights in Poland surged to the forefront of public debate following the regime transformation in 1989. Under the communist regime, abortion was often utilized as a method of contraception, largely due to the scarcity of other means. However, the discourse began to change as the Solidarity movement, which adopted a neoconservative stance in the mid-1980s, gave rise to a vocal anti-abortion lobby. This ideological shift culminated in the 1990s. As Malinowska recalls,

> Unfortunately, in the 1990s, the then leader of the Solidarity Trade Union strengthened the rule of men in this trade union that grew out of a social movement that owed its survival during martial law and ultimate victory to women. Indeed, the Women's Rights Section, which was part of the National Solidarity Commission, was dissolved by its chairman Marian Krzaklewski "for supporting the liberal anti-abortion law" (inner quote of Ewa Bugno-Zalewska) (Malinowska 2010).

As the influence of Catholic fundamentalists swelled and liberals remained ambivalent, the grip on women's reproductive freedoms tightened (Czapliński 2016; Kościelniak 2018, 2020) According to Czapliński (2016: 218), "The power that emerged after 1989 turned out to be a power of the male kind: it dispossessed women of their subjectivity and turned the female body into an object of political negotiation." The 1993 legislation, known retrospectively as "the abortion compromise," permitted abortion under narrowly defined circumstances: rape or incest, risk to the mother's life or health, severe fetal defects, or extreme life hardship—though the latter provision was revoked by the Constitutional Tribunal in 1997 (Desperak 2003).

Despite attempts to modify these laws, the essence of the "compromise" remained. Supported by the Catholic Church and global anti-abortion networks, the anti-abortion faction grew (Suchanow 2020). A major political shift occurred in 2015, when the conservative Law and Justice Party came to power. Parliamentary debates on a citizens' initiative for a total ban on abortion, led by Kaja Godek, was met with the massive

demonstrations that came to be known as the Black Protest. Tensions peaked on October 22, 2020, when the Constitutional Tribunal ruled that the termination of a pregnancy due to fetal abnormalities was unconstitutional and thus sparked national and international protests that continued into the spring of 2021.

The Contemporary Polish Feminist Movement

Within the Polish feminist movement, the distinction between women's rights activism and feminism is nuanced and often blurred. Activists within these milieus encounter significant discursive barriers and regularly face hostility from parts of the public. A key facet of such opposition is the persistent anti-abortion discourse, which vehemently challenges the wider spectrum of feminist ideology (Koralewska & Zielińska 2022). The narrative is a component of broader anti-gender campaigns that have attempted to vilify feminism as a "gender ideology" and to associate it—in line with expansive anti-leftist *ressentiments*—with the ill-defined notion of "cultural Marxism" (Patternotte & Kuhar 2017; Graff & Korolczuk 2018, 2022). Such anti-leftist sentiment is a legacy of the repudiation of communism during Poland's systemic transformation in 1989 and has been perpetuated by the rising dominance of rightwing parties since the mid-2000s (Drozda 2015; Gwiazda 2021). Nevertheless, recent trends point to a substantial shift, particularly among young women, with an increasing number embracing feminist ideologies and self-identifying as feminists (Muszel & Piotrowski 2022b). Young feminist activists are spearheading innovation in the movement across three dimensions: organizational structures, where there is a growing preference for horizontal and informal frameworks (Earl et al. 2017); framing and claims, which now embody a new confrontational identity while integrating new grievances with traditional political views (Whittier 1997); and action repertoires, with an emphasis on direct action, prefigurative politics, and extensive use of online networking (Bennett & Segerberg 2013; Cohen et al. 2012; Loader et al. 2014; Pavan & Mainardi 2018; Urzędowska & Suchomska 2020; Kostrzewska 2020). These innovations are evident within the Polish feminist context and also resonate among Polish migrants, illustrating the transnational character of feminist activism (Gober & Struzik 2018, Muszel 2024).

What Is New About the Post-2004 Migration?

Following Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004, the UK was one of the first countries to open its labor markets, leading to significant migration from Poland, particularly among young people. Due to high unemployment in Poland at the time, some 1.2 million people moved to the UK over the following years. The Polish view of the UK as a stereotypical migrant destination was solidified to the point that it became a theme for TV comedy series and stand-up shows.

Post-accession migration occurred in different geopolitical and technological contexts than previous migration and has been characterized as "transmigration," a form in which migrants maintain close ties with Poland. Due to visa-free travel and low-cost

flights, these transmigrants could easily visit Poland, continue their studies, and keep regular appointments, for instance, with doctors. Technological advances, especially in communications, have played a crucial role. Cheap phone calls, online communicators, and the rise of social media have facilitated intense networking between Polish migrants in the UK and their contacts in Poland. One result has been the formation of Polish enclaves in British cities: in London, for example, Ealing and Hammersmith are sometimes referred to as Polish neighborhoods.

Since 2004, such neighborhoods have developed infrastructure for migrants, including Polish shops, football clubs, and charities, which are mostly aimed at self-help and the promotion of Polish culture. However, the notable politicization of the Polish community, particularly among newer, younger migrants, has led to new types of initiatives. The newer migrants also connected with long-established migrant organizations such as POSK (Polski Ośrodek Społeczno-Kulturalny) (Elgenius 2017), although the connections were often less intense than expected due to different worldviews and organizational approaches.

Political initiatives have often been a direct response to events in Poland, as was particularly noticeable during the feminist protests of 2016 and 2020. The most recent wave of migrants has been more involved in Polish political life than earlier groups, due to different political conditions and more intense communication, which has kept them well informed about developments in Poland.

Methods

This article employs a qualitative research approach grounded in social movement theory and transnational studies. The decision to adopt qualitative methods is based on their suitability for capturing the nuanced, lived experiences of activists, which aligns with the broader tradition of using ethnography and interviews to explore social movements (Blee & Taylor 2002; Della Porta 2015). Fieldwork was conducted among Polish migrants in the UK in the summer and autumn of 2021 and autumn of 2023. The interviews were initially hampered by COVID-19; however, the restrictions allowed for reflection on activism during and after the pandemic and produced rich insights into the evolution of activist networks. The choice to conduct interviews via Zoom or other online forms chosen by the interviewees was influenced by both practical constraints and ethical considerations, particularly in regard to ensuring the anonymity and comfort of the participants, which is essential when dealing with political topics (Wiles et al. 2008). In total, 28 interviews were conducted with activists from London, Edinburgh, Manchester, Birmingham, and various small towns in England and Wales. The recruitment process relied on a snowballing sample within the community of Polish migrants in the UK (where the authors' personal ties from secondary school and university times allowed them to identify gatekeepers for the snowballing).

The methodological assumptions of this research derive from the interpretive paradigm, which emphasizes understanding social phenomena from the perspective of those involved (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2011). The use of biographical interviews allows for a deeper

exploration of identity formation and political engagement—both of which are key themes in social movement studies (Goodwin & Jasper 2009). The interviews lasted between one and two and a half hours and were recorded and transcribed, and then coded using QDA software, which allowed for the thematic organization of data.

The central themes raised during the interviews corresponded with the major discussions among scholars of social movements and also guided our analysis below. The themes were the following:

— How do Polish migrants become politically active in the UK, and what factors influence their engagement? This question aligns with research on the biographical pathways to activism, which are often explored through life-story interviews (Blee & Taylor 2002; Hesse-Biber 2011). The data from ethnographic fieldwork should also show what images of themselves activists have and help to analyze their identity-formation processes.
— How is Polish national identity mobilized in political activism, and what role does gender play in advancing ideological orientations and demands? How do group members perceive the role of women in society, and how do these perceptions relate to traditional Polish gender roles? Insights into these questions should emerge from ethnographic studies, including interviews and observations, as well as critical discourse analysis of various activist publications, such as pamphlets, manifestos, social media posts and online discussions.
— To what extent do these activists engage with local structures or do they keep their own group structures, brought with them from Poland?

Analysis

How do migrants become active in their host country?

Many Polish women activists in the UK were not involved in activism before they migrated. For them and their counterparts in Poland, 2016 was a pivotal year that sparked their interest in women's activism. This year catalyzed their transformation from non-activists to prominent figures within a transnationally connected feminist movement. According to Krzysztof Podemski (2020), the creation of organizations such as Dziewuchy London (modeled on Dziewuchy Dziewuchom [Gals for Gals] in Poland), FARSA, POMOC (active since 2019, formally established in 2020), and others, exemplified a grassroots approach to feminist activism that stresses informality and flexibility. Podemski observes that these groups "emphasize their total lack of formalization" (2020: 133) and provide "a place where women finally have a voice that they were not given before" (2020: 135). The empowering aspect of these movements was thereby reinforced, and women were enabled to carve out new spaces for expression and action.

The recollections of the activists themselves paint a vivid picture of this shift. One veteran activist recalls the establishment of Dziewuchy in Poland and the subsequent spontaneous formation of related groups abroad, indicating a ripple effect spurred by homeland politics. Her progression from initial involvement to professional activism,

including organizing protests and collaborating with KOD,[1] showcases the deepening of her engagement over time, mirroring the evolving landscape of transnational activism.

Since 2016, there was the abortion project. It was a total abortion ban project, which led to the formation of Dziewuchy in Poland, and groups started to spontaneously form abroad, and in London a group was also formed and I went to the first meeting and that's how it stayed. Since then, I've been in several activist groups; we regularly organize protests. Later I also started to cooperate a little with KOD. Now I'm actually acting professionally, because I'm employed in the organization POMOC, and we are in the process of organizing two protests related to the situation on the Polish-Belarusian[2] border.

Similarly, another interviewee's narrative highlights the organic formation of Dziewuchy Dziewuchom London (later renamed Dziewuchy London), in response to events in Poland. This indicates a strong transnational connection, where developments in the homeland act as a catalyst for mobilization in the diaspora:

In 2016, after the creation of the Dziewuchy Dziewuchom group in Poland, I got the idea that we could create such a group in London, and then I wrote to [name of the activist] and it really started with us. We didn't know each other well at that time, but we just organized a group for the first meeting and we called ourselves Dziewuchy Dziewuchom London.

Furthermore, the experience of one activist, who starting work at the Feminist Library in tandem with the rise of Polish activism in 2016, underscores the synchronicity of movements across borders. This convergence suggests that political and social upheavals in Poland have a direct and immediate impact on the diaspora, fostering a sense of shared struggle and solidarity.

I started working at the Feminist Library and it was at the same time as [the events of] 2016 started, so directly Polish activism drew in Poles here in the UK as well, not just in Poland—that is, a lot of people I know from our Polish activism got involved at the same time for similar reasons.

Law and Justice's electoral victory in Poland in 2015 (when the party secured a majority in both chambers of parliament and had its candidate as the president) resulted not only in a greater mobilization of Poles within their own country but also mobilized Poles abroad (if in smaller numbers). One of the founders of Dziewuchy London recalls her reaction to these developments:

Since 2015, when Law and Justice came to power, I had been following all the events, and the total ban on abortion [in October 2020] made me leave my computer and go from shouting vulgar words at the computer screen to shouting vulgar words at the Embassy building in London.

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[1] KOD (Committee for the Defense of Democracy) is one of the key anti-Law and Justice initiatives in Poland. As Podemski (2020: 116) describes it: "Already on November 18, Krzysztof Łoziński, in an article on the Opinion Studio portal referring to Havel's idea of the 'power of the powerless,' proposed the establishment of the Committee for the Defense of Democracy. A day later, Mateusz Kijowski and Jarosław Marciniak set up a KOD group on Facebook. The group gathered 30,000 supporters after only three days. […] The first big KOD demonstration took place in Warsaw on December 12. It was attended, according to different data, by 20,000 to 50,000 people."

[2] In 2020, a refugee crisis emerged as Belarusian authorities directed waves of refugees from the Middle East and Central Asia toward the Polish-Belarusian border. Poland responded with pushback measures and other repression, sparking an activist-led campaign to uphold human rights and international law at the border, see: https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/fifty-shades-of-whiteness/on-peripheral-whiteness-and-being-central-eastern-european

Expanding the Activism to Engagement in Local Issues

The engagement of Polish feminist activists in the UK extends beyond the realm of reproductive rights to encompass a broader spectrum of social and political issues that resonate both in Poland and in the diaspora in the UK. This multifaceted involvement aligns with Transnational Political Action (TPA) theory and particularly with its emphasis on explicitly political actions and more institutionalized forms of politics.

The activists' endeavors to raise awareness about migrants' rights and to encourage active participation in local politics illustrate an essential aspect of transnational activism: the diaspora remains deeply connected to homeland politics while simultaneously integrating into the host society's political landscape.

> After the campaign, we met and talked to many people. Even those who were politically active in the Polish context didn't know that they had the right to vote for the [local] mayor or for councilors. So, if there are people who follow Polish politics, go to protests, and are part of activist groups who don't know they have voting rights in the UK, then I suspect a whole lot of people don't know.

The engagement of Polish activists in the UK in regard to informing their community about voting rights illustrates that an important aspect of Transnational Political Action (TPA) is bridging information gaps and empowering the diaspora to participate in the political processes of their host country. This activism goes beyond raising awareness. It fosters political agency among Polish migrants by educating them about their rights and opportunities for civic engagement in the UK. In line with a more institutionalized form of TPA that involves interaction with existing political structures to influence policy, such efforts contribute to a stronger, better informed migrant community capable of effectively expressing its concerns and interests.

Furthermore, these activists are tackling complex issues such as Brexit and its impact on the Polish community, navigating the intricacies of transnational identities and loyalties. Their work underscores their ability to engage with the political dynamics of both their home and host countries and highlights the importance of such dual participation.

Initiatives by Polish feminist groups such as POMOC have expanded their focus to include all Eastern European women, on the basis of their shared experience, particularly in regard to labor market challenges and Brexit-related issues. This broadened perspective emphasizes the collective experiences and wider implications of transnational feminist activism.

Moreover, such inclusivity also acknowledges a commonality in political engagement rooted in a distinct Eastern European cultural and political upbringing:

> POMOC has the statutory objective to work with women and we are also a little bit concerned about balancing the institutions of power and having more women in them. And more women will be there as more go to vote. Generally, it's not that women vote less in the UK, and it was quite difficult to find specific data on the electoral activity of migrant women from Eastern Europe and specifically from Poland.

POMOC's statutory objectives underscore a commitment to gender equality, not just in terms of representation but also in terms of active political participation. The organization's focus on increasing the number of women in positions of power through encouraging voting is indicative of a broader strategy to enhance the political agency of Eastern European migrant women in the UK.

Expanding the Activism of Polish Feminists in the UK into Other Areas

These efforts to increase the electoral participation of Eastern European migrant women are in line with a broader feminist and democratic agenda aimed at creating more inclusive and representative political systems. Organizations such as POMOC work to address gaps in political representation and challenge traditional narratives of political participation in both host and home countries. Contemporary activism, often referred to as "millennial activism" (Chironi 2019), represents a dynamic, interconnected landscape in which activists frequently engage with multiple groups or coalitions that share common goals. This trend is evident among Polish feminist activists in the UK, who move between different organizations and contribute to a broad range of initiatives. Their fluidity enhances the activist ecosystem and extends the influence and effectiveness of their efforts, as seen in the organization of protests.

As one activist said:

> It's a bit like these groups intermingle: there are people who are active in many of them, or first in one, then in another. We also always try to work out a position so that we can do as many things as possible together, because the protests are the most successful when they are organized by coalitions of groups.

At the same time, activism in the UK to support the struggle for reproductive rights in Poland is perceived as being easier, due to the smaller risks of being the target of either counter-movements or actions of the state. One of the interviewees explained that

> [We want] to support activists in Poland, because we know that it's much easier for us, because we don't have this police violence. Admittedly, there were unpleasant actions during our protests, where there were also counter-protests and there were also outbreaks of violence, which were of course very unpleasant, but the truth is that usually there are 2–3 of them, so it's not a terrible power and nothing really happened to anyone except that once or twice we got scared. And in Poland the situation is much more serious. People are beaten, people are arrested, and things go on for years. We are aware of this and we join with the activists in Poland, and we ask them all the time what they need.

The protesters often mentioned that they feel safe and are protected by the British police, who, however, do not really understand/do not want to get into the essence of the protest and the dispute (e.g., when a group of aggressive counter-protesters appears). It is understood that the police may consider a dispute within the Polish community in the UK to be of minor importance in the context of British domestic politics.

Such examples show the growing intersectionality of Polish feminist activism and suggest that it should be analyzed as a "family of movements" (della Porta 2015) rather than as an isolated phenomenon.

The collaborative approach of Polish feminist groups in the UK extends beyond organizing protests to actively encouraging women to participate in local politics, and particularly to run for elections. Such encouragement is not merely about increasing passive voting rights but is aimed at fostering a culture of active political engagement and leadership among women. The focus on empowering women to assume visible roles as community leaders and to take credit for their work reflects a deeper commitment to gender equality and representation in political spaces.

> What we want is for women (…) to be visible in such roles as community leaders, to shape such attitudes in women that they are not afraid to take on such roles, or not afraid to take credit for the work they do, to be in these positions of power.

By advocating for women to take on positions of power and visibility, these feminist groups are not only addressing the underrepresentation of women in politics but also challenging societal norms and expectations regarding women's roles in both the public and private spheres. This push for more female leadership in local politics represents a crucial aspect of the broader feminist agenda and seeks to make the political landscape more inclusive and equitable.

The role of educational initiatives is critical in this context. Such organizations focus on equipping women with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the intricacies of local political systems, including learning how to organize and create effective campaigns and understanding the process of becoming a local councilor. As one of the informal leaders of a recently established Polish social organization described it:

> And our aim is to create a political home for women in Great Britain, for migrant women. We concentrate more on Polish women and on Eastern Europe. The aim is to support women leaders in the UK and to do this we need elements of support for their basic rights, mental health, and political education, as well as education on how to organize, how to create a campaign, how to become a local councilor. We are now in [the process of] talks with Young Europeans on an initiative that would support women at the stage where they are already candidates and [teach them] how to create campaigns that support those particular candidates who are migrants in the UK.

However, Polish organizations seem not to be eager to raise political issues, as they are afraid it will discourage their supporters. The reluctance of the organizations is connected to the generally bad perception of political activism in Poland (but surprisingly, social activism is not perceived in the same way). The bad reputation of political activism limits the possibilities for cooperation, but some activists have recently been contradicting the main narrative:

> There are a lot of organizations that support the Polish community in the UK, but they don't really deal with political education, and they don't really want to raise these issues because they are afraid that it will scare their audience. So topics such as anti-racism don't come up very much. We wanted to prove that it is possible to create an organization that addresses such topics and at the same time supports people when it comes to labor rights, immigration rights, and so on.

Transnational Political Remittances

The next phenomenon observed in the interviews is known in the literature as "transnational political remittances." In short, it is a situation in which people who do not live in Poland and are not thus directly affected by the changing policies on abortion nevertheless want to protest the law:

> It violated my basic rights, even though I don't live in Poland—I have no plans to return to Poland, but I grew up in Poland and I remember what it means to be a teenage girl and to grow up in Poland in a panic-stricken fear of an unwanted pregnancy. And [to have] the feeling that there is no way out of this situation. And after living in the UK for a while I experienced a completely different reality and the thought that things in Poland were going to get even worse—it's like…the most primal instincts arose in me and caused me to go to my first meeting and my first protest.

As a research theme, transnational solidarity was widely discussed in the social movement literature of the late 1990s and early 2000s, with the rise of the Global Justice

Movement. In the case of movements for reproductive rights, the common ground for transnational solidarity is universal, as it relates to gendered experiences and therefore makes cooperation easier and more intense, but at the same time it opens opportunities for new areas of cooperation, based on shared feelings of oppression. As one of the interviewees described it:

> We were supported by Irish women; we were supported by Latin American women from different groups. We also always try to emphasize the power of international activism and the power of solidarity between women, between migrants, between people who may be experiencing different things in different parts of the world.

Transnational Solidarity and the Nature of Cooperation

Migrant mobilizations today are characterized by their organizational capacity and networking, facilitated by virtually unlimited global communication technologies (Ataç et al. 2020). As Gržinić and Tatlić (2014) have noted, although new migrant movements, including those led by Polish migrant women in the UK, often have restricted formal organizations, they are more focused than previous waves of migrants to the UK on building domestic, national, and transnational alliances. According to della Porta (2018: 11), support from broad networks is crucial given the limited material and symbolic resources available to these groups. Support from a diverse range of actors, including migrants from other countries with similar experiences and varying legal statuses, helps to maximize the impact, visibility, and reach of their actions. It also helps to generate the cultural and symbolic capital needed to counteract the stigma associated with being a foreigner (Nicholls 2013: 92).

In terms of alliances and cooperation between the new wave of Polish migrant women's organizations and other Polish migrant groups after 2004, some exchange of experiences and mutual learning has been observed. However, cooperation between the pro-women movement and organizations founded by earlier waves of migrants was minimal. At the same time, an intriguing dynamic, indicative of developing interactions and collaborations, was observed within the broader pro-women movement. In addition to the activists being better heard (due to broader networks), there is also a two-way learning process for the actors involved. One activist later described it thus:

> I think that this element of education works both ways. I learnt a lot about politics in Poland from KOD, because they really followed what TVN was broadcasting, what was said on TVP.[3] They organized a lot of meetings with various representatives of politics and other people. So it was quite a good exchange of different experiences. However, when it comes to the issue of language—that it should be equal, inclusive, feminist, not exclusionary, it seems to me that Dziewuchy and Razem paid more attention to it.

The actions of Polish activists in the UK express solidarity and support for women in Poland, but the threat/impact of Polish state policy on women's reproductive rights does not directly affect Polish women in the UK, so emotions are not as high as in Poland, and consequently there is also less conflict within the movement. One of the activists said,

[3] TVN is the main TV station in Poland connected to the liberal opposition. TVP, the public broadcaster, on the other hand, was accused of being highly politicized and following the ruling party's propaganda to present a one-sided account of contemporary events during the years 2015–2023.

I think that it also helps us that we stand in solidarity with those women, with those people who are fighting for their lives in Poland, but for us it is not direct. It is important to us, because we want things to be better in Poland. But when we go to these protests, we go to show our solidarity, (…) and in Poland there is this fight, there is a bit more on the scale, and I think that is why emotions are also stronger there and it is easier to cause conflicts.

The second explanation for the smaller scale of internal conflicts is connected to the organizational nature of the activism, for instance, Women's Strike in the UK is in its formation stage, which protects the movement in a sense from the negative effects of conflicts, that is, the conflict over leadership is not as intense as in more established organizations. One of the activists said,

I think that the recent conflicts in the Women's Strike have not affected us that much. There is another group, the Women's Strike UK. Also, the strength of the Women's Strike is that it operates in such a dispersed way and there is a lot of room for these groups to dynamically form and break up and form again and break up, and all the time there is a stage of formation of the group and maybe this allows—or provides—protection against the negative effects of conflict. Because before someone manages to get seriously offended, there is another unit and you can join somewhere else.

This could be an argument for the importance of rhizomatic models of organization, a trend amplified during the Global Justice Movement and a feature of "millennial activism."

On the one hand, the smaller number of conflicts within the movement might be a result of a smaller number of activists in the host country, but on the other hand, the heterogeneity of the movement is perceived as its strength:

We wanted the movement to be horizontal and this first protest was organized by Dziewuchy Dziewuchom. Later two groups were created from Dziewuchy: Dziewuchy London and FARSA. And later we started to organize together more; we pushed to support each other, not to do it [separately]…and until now it seems to me that Dziewuchy and POMOC are such a common voice—which always draws attention to the fact that we shouldn't organize such protests alone but do it together as a coalition of organizations, because then we have more power.

Conclusion

Contemporary migrant activism is not only an interesting social and political phenomenon, but also illustrates numerous of the challenges highlighted in social movement theory. The most obvious challenge for activism is the arena in which migrants struggle. On the one hand, migrant activists operate in a host country whose conditions are often very different from those in their home countries. On the other hand, according to the concept of political remittances, the situation in the home country is a crucial mobilizing factor. Moreover, the changing nature of communication, in which horizontal and peer-to-peer communication via social media play a key role, has an impact on the nature of migration. Polish migrants in the UK are a good example of what we have called "transmigrants," as Poles who have moved to the UK can stay in touch not only with their relatives, friends, and colleagues, but also with events in Poland. Lack of (extensive) bureaucratic challenges (at least until the post-Brexit period), cheap flights, and continuous contact with friends and colleagues from Poland resulted in the higher involvement of Polish migrants in Polish affairs. This is particularly evident in the case of Poles in the UK, as Polish politics after 2015 underwent

significant polarization, due to the controversial politics and policies of the governing Law and Justice party (which had repercussions throughout Europe). It is rather obvious that opportunities will arise when immigrants find that the host country's institutions and elites share the migrants' views on their home-country government. As Josh DeWind and Renata Segura (2014) noted, this "convergence" enables immigrants to gain support for, or condemn, the authorities of their country of origin.

Therefore, one of the issues central to this article is the nature of the new wave and type of political activism of Poles in the UK. The women's/feminist movement is a good case study because it touches on issues and challenges that are common worldwide: discrimination against women is universal and varies only in degree. This fact fosters greater transnational solidarity, both in relation to the host and home countries but also in allowing activism to link struggles in different parts of the world. Two phenomena coincide here: the emergence of a new wave of women's activism, which is often associated with the #MeToo movement, and the new wave of activists who are labeled "millennials." The activism of millennials is characterized by greater inclusiveness and intersectionality in their claims and demands. Contemporary Polish feminist activism—including the feminist activism conducted by Poles in the UK—shows a number of similarities with the activism of millennials described in the literature. The protests in the UK in 2016 and especially in 2020—where the agenda was expanded to a more universal struggle for women's rights and other forms of discrimination against migrants—are a good example.

We have also found that Polish women's activism in the UK is not only about Polish women. To some extent it is a reaction to the controversial policies of the Law and Justice party, but the specific situation of the activists (their exposure to discrimination as women and also as migrants) resulted in their broadening the scope of their activism to include migrants from the whole region. The situation of migrants from the "new" EU countries worsened after Brexit. In addition to bureaucratic issues connected to obtaining settled resident status, which was a challenge for many migrants, the Brexit debate also incited numerous anti-migrant sentiments. Consequently, some of the migrants became more politically active, and then the changes to Poland's abortion law in 2020 not only sparked protests in the UK but also initiated further politicization. One of the complaints of migrants during the Brexit campaign was that their voice was not heard in the debate. Perhaps this is the reason why some of the migrants' organizations and mobilizations tend to focus on the larger involvement of activists in mainstream and institutionalized politics, and thus encourage activists to take part in elections and run for political positions in the UK.

Finally, we observed the use of networks established during the COVID pandemic to facilitate activism and vice versa (e.g., in the case of legal help connected to Brexit). For obvious reasons, the structure of Polish feminist and women's activism in the UK resembles its counterparts in Poland (in regard to allies, slogans and claims, and visual identification). However, the situation of being abroad impacts the way the movement acts. There are fewer internal conflicts within the movement in the broad sense; the environment is more understanding and sympathizing (i.e., discursively, and the level of repression on the part of the state and its agencies is also lower) and this affects the movement's actions. Furthermore, there are broader possibilities for making alliances with local UK organizations and with other migrants' initiatives.

The bridging of borders mentioned in the title has a dual metaphorical meaning. On the one hand, it refers to creating bridges over the limitations migrant women face in connection with their residence status, ethnic background, gender, and at times, age. The other meaning refers to building bridges between feminist activists beyond the borders of their own countries or their host countries. In this sense, feminist activism can become a common platform bringing together issues from the home and host countries and linking feminist struggles.

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Biographical Notes:

Grzegorz Piotrowski (Ph.D.) is an assistant professor at the Institute of Sociology at the University of Gdańsk and a senior researcher at European Solidarity Centre in Gdańsk, Poland. He focuses on research on radical social movements, civil society, and democratisation.

ORCID iD: 0000-0001-5193-4661

E-mail: grzegorz.piotrowski@ug.edu.pl

Magdalena Muszel (Ph.D.) is a sociologist, cultural anthropologist, and feminist activist. Since 2016, she has been researching feminist social movements in Poland. She published numerous articles and academic papers on transnationalism, gender relations, and the feminist social movement. As of 2022, she is an assistant professor at the University of Gdańsk. Since 2019, Magdalena Muszel has held the position of president at Zatoka Foundation

(www.fundacjazatoka.org), an organization dedicated to social research and supporting culture and education at the university level.

ORCID iD: 0000-0001-5800-6630

E-mail: magdalena.muszel@ug.edu.pl