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Emotionality and Rationality of Participants in Women's Civic Protests in Poland (the Case of the Greater Poland Voivodeship)

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Abstract

After 22 October 2020, when the Constitutional Tribunal of the Republic of Poland announced the judgment on the protection of fetuses and grounds for permitting the termination of pregnancy, a vast wave of civic protests swept through Poland. During these protests, new spaces for expression of discontent and resistance that were previously absent during protests against the tightening of abortion laws emerged. Their innovation was largely based on creating boundary areas with their liminality clearly beyond the sub-world of protests. Relations between the emotionality and rationality of the protestors' actions played a unique role in this process. This text is an attempt to diagnose the tendencies signalled above.

Keywords:

Civic protest, emotionality, rationality, liminality, COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduction

After 22 October 2020, when the Constitutional Tribunal of the Republic of Poland announced the judgment on the protection of fetuses and grounds for permitting the termination of pregnancy (tribunal.gov.pl, 2020), street protests began in most Polish cities and towns. These actions continued with varying intensity until the judgment was published in the Journal of Laws on 27 January 2021. The new legal regulation removed the possibility for termination of pregnancy due to severe and irreversible impairment of the fetus or an incurable life-threatening disease. Thus, there remain only two grounds for abortion: (1) if the pregnancy poses a threat to the life or health of the pregnant woman and (2) when there is a reasonable suspicion that the pregnancy resulted from rape ("Journal of Laws", 1993).

The overwhelming majority of women expressed their resistance to the limitation of the "abortion compromise" operating in Poland. Many men supported their wives, life partners and friends involved in these actions. As protests against the stricter abortion laws swept through Poland, Argentina simultaneously passed legislation allowing legal abortions up to the 14th week of pregnancy. Given that the COVID-19 pandemic created times of high risk to health and life, the scale of the nationwide protest (that featured large crowds gathered in public places) surprised the state authorities, the police, the media, and all Poles.

From the very beginning, the spontaneous protest was characterised by the participants' strong emotional displays. Analyses of emotions (emotionality) in spaces of social protest have more than once been the subject of interest for sociologists. In the perspective of analysis that interests us, it is necessary to refer to works seeking explanations for the arousal/release of emotions and their interpretation

and expression through participation in different social groups (see, e.g. Collins, 1975; 1981; Hochschild, 1983; Kemper, 1978; 1991; Scheff, 1979; 1988). Similarly relevant are works on the relationship between emotionality and rationality in the world of politics, social movements and civil protest (Goodwin, Jasper, Poletta, 2001; Gould, 2003; Marx Ferree, 2003; Mathieu, 2005; Jasper, 2018). The last author mentioned above has rightly pointed out that through emotions, we are embedded in different environmental, bodily, social, moral and temporal contexts, and that politics and collective action have always been a kind of laboratory for working out models of human action (Jasper, 2018).

For our considerations, we assume that (...) *emotions (...) are mental processes consisting in the attitude towards objects, persons and phenomena. Their arousal is most often a direct stimulus to action, i.e. they constitute a more or less fixed readiness to act* (Grzywa, 2012, p. 80). We choose the medical science approach among the many perspectives on defining and describing emotions (cf. Dąbrowski, 2014). Nowadays, using the latest achievements of neuroscience, it seems closest to their essence and the participation of emotions in the processes they co-create in the social world. Striving to understand emotions from a gendered perspective is also a worthwhile effort when studying them in this context. While investigating the social meaning of emotions based on gender, Arlie Russell Hochschild drew attention to the connections between emotional culture and action strategies resulting from gender socialisation (Hochschild, 1990, p. 125). Considering the broad sociopolitical background of the protests in question, the concept of gender seems to be explicit here. The protests against the tightening of abortion laws, which manifested as a narrative that directed attention to women's agency and decision-making, paradoxically

also provided a stage for men to act. Men visibly supported female protesters, expressing their involvement in the demonstrations at almost every duration stage. From a social point of view, the consistent participation of men in the protests confirmed that many Poles believe that women should be the primary decision-makers on the issue of abortion. The response to the competition we announced at AMU Faculty of Sociology, which provides the empirical basis for the presented text, also confirms the pervasiveness of this belief.

In the last twenty years or so, emotionality has become a value. Arousing and releasing emotions is regarded today as a normal state that is conducive to satisfactory assessments of one's quality of life, or at least it is promoted in this way. On the one hand, this state is a ricochet effect of innovative patterns of post-hippy alternative culture that was successfully implemented in the adult lives of the Baby Boomer generation in the United States and their peers in Western Europe since the 1970s. On the other hand, it is the aftermath of the "active parent era" at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, during which Generation X played the leading role in modifying the course of socialisation processes¹.

Contemporary Westerners (of all ages) are mostly emotionally aroused and ready for an impulsive, emotional reaction both in the world of everyday life and taking extraordinary joint actions, including high social engagement events, like civic protests. For them, the emotionality of such joint actions/activities (often stimulated by social media) is a natural environment – superficial and transient. These are sub-worlds of the reality surrounding us, which they know well and willingly enter into – it is their world. This space includes not

only the emotional realm but also the body. As Adrián Scribano notes, (...) *today, more than ever, we live in a world where society elaborates (and also commodifies) emotions from bodies and bodies from emotions* (Scribano, 2012, p. 96). It is hard not to notice that both of them reveal themselves very clearly in the reality of the protests, especially since the topic of abortion directly involves both emotions and the body.

As Anna Grzywa wrote, (...) *people generally do not consider what activity is guiding their behaviour at a given moment because most often, both emotionality and rationality oscillate around average values. If there is a predominance of emotionality, it gives way to rationality after some time. Perhaps there is a mechanism that automatically returns the oscillations to the mean line after a period of increased oscillations. It seems that this mechanism is rationality, which has a repressive effect on emotionality, and it aims to protect the central nervous system from being subjected to increased stimulation for too long* (Grzywa 2010, p. 81). In times when stimuli and information overload the brain, the rationality mechanism is effectively suppressed (cf. Carr, 2010). (...) *When mental activities are subordinated to strongly experienced emotions, rational thinking may be weakened or even turned off* (Grzywa 2010, p. 80), and the limitation of rational thinking (...) *is significant for any method of manipulation to be effective* (Grzywa 2010, pp. 55–56).

Émile Durkheim, analysing the specificity of anomie, pointed out that (...) *the state of deregulation or anomy is thus further heightened by passions being less disciplined, precisely when they need more disciplining* (Durkheim 2005, p. 214). However, today, emotions are even purposely aroused. An excited consumer might turn off rational thinking or fails to activate it before considering the decision. Immediately begins to act, and the speed of these actions is accelerated by mobile applications

¹ The reader will find a broad discussion of the processes, which are only indicated here, elsewhere. See, e.g. Wrzesień, 2009; 2014; 2017.

(e.g. banking, shopping). In everyday life, the state of purposely aroused excitement is supposed to limit rationality to a minimum because rationality poses a threat to maintaining expected profit levels. That is, the more conscious consumer spends less. However, the scale of profits increases when consumers are effectively encouraged to make quick decisions based on emotions.

Using the business world as an example, the mechanism presented above illustrates a new feature of the modern system of Western culture social control, control through emotions, or more precisely, control through constant emotional arousal and maintaining this arousal at the highest possible level. Advertising slogans such as "Wake up your emotions!" are not just a play on words, and the intensification of emotions is connected with the promotion of individualism that has been present in the Western world since the beginning of the 1970s (cf. Wrzesień, 2014; 2017), in fact being its derivative.

Emotions are essential in our lives². However, excessive intensification of them is not. Man owes the experience of emotions to biochemical processes in the brain. Emotions can be both suppressed and aroused. Thanks to increased neurobiological knowledge, controlling the sphere of human emotions has become more achievable in recent years. This knowledge is used by all those who use skilful manipulation mechanisms to control modern societies of emotional individualists. The above mentioned macro-social perspective is realised mainly by leaders in the business world. Conversely, in the micro-social

perspective, the promotion of individualism and emotionality coexist with the increased need to satisfy a sense of security. Most modern people are less prone to complying with normative regulations (anomy) (see Wrzesień, 2017; 2019), but paradoxically also want to have everything under their own control. Thanks to mobile phones and tracking applications, they can exercise constant surveillance of the actions of their children and loved ones or check their activity on social networks. In times of aroused emotions (specifically fear), the desire to maintain or increase control over one's environment intensifies (cf. Grzywa, 2010).

In such complex areas of contemporary reality, we are interested in the rationality of individual actors in spaces of civic protest. Using the retrospective accounts of the respondents and applying the principles of phenomenological insight into selected sub-worlds of civic protest, we focus on analysing the reasons for the actions taken and the vision of the potential effects of the forms of activity implemented. We are interested in perceiving broader perspectives of evaluating protests and participation in them, the fears and anxieties connected with them, the contents transferred during them, and reflections on the future shape of Polish society if the protestors' demands could be implemented to a greater or lesser extent.

Method

In November 2020, at the Faculty of Sociology of Adam Mickiewicz University (Department of Sociology of Civilisation), a competition was announced for participants of protests asking, "What is participation in civic protests for you?" The competition task called for a written report responding to fifteen detailed questions/topics included in the call for proposals. Twelve people took part in the competition (10 women; 2 men), and their description of the

characteristics of the protests has a total of 197 pages. Although women authored the majority of submissions, the descriptions prepared by men were also cognitively valuable. The analysis of these gender-differentiated visions of civic protests provides an interesting insight into the processes of defining agency and its accompanying emotions and reflections.

The vast majority of participants (n=10/N=12) are activists – people with various forms of involvement in civil protests in their biography. Hence, the insight into the spaces of the Greater Poland civic protests of the turn of 2020 and 2021 became a specific case study of their sub-world, actions, opinions, attitudes, and manifested values. The sample can be considered in terms of "incomplete" typological representativeness (Nowak, 1977). It is impossible to extract all values of the "activists" variable that occur among Polish society and Greater Poland.

Our considerations in the presented article are based on statements related to the following questions/topics: "Have you participated before 22 October 2020, in any protests, e.g. demonstrations, happenings, rallies, collecting signatures and similar actions?"; "Describe your participation in the protests after the Constitutional Tribunal's judgment on 22 October concerning the right to abortion."; "Describe as accurately as possible the reasons why you took part in these protests."; "What would you like to achieve through these protests?"; "What do you think will happen next? What will be the immediate and more distant consequences of the protests?"; "How do you imagine Poland after the end of these protests?"; "What kind of Poland are you fighting for? What change do you expect?"

The competition was announced on 22 November 2020 on the University homepage. The competition invitation was also published in the local edition of the largest Polish daily newspaper, "Gazeta Wyborcza", on the City of

Poznań homepage and selected Facebook profiles. Messages about the competition also appeared in other local media, including radio stations.

Due to the specificity of the adopted method of collecting empirical material, we did not expect a significant response. The majority of participants were women. Four were aged between 20–29, four between 30–39, and two were over 40 (44 and 50). Of the two men who submitted entries, only one gave his age, and he was 35.

The competition was addressed to the inhabitants of Greater Poland Voivodeship, which occupies second place in Poland in terms of area and third place in terms of population. Voivodeships in Poland are units of administrative division which correspond to provinces in many other countries. Given the political nature of the protests in question, note that Greater Poland is a region in which opposition parties have a dominant position, including the leading Civic Coalition (KO), composed of several parties. The predominance of opposition parties in the local authorities of the region and cities is clear. However, the KO itself has only two seats more in the Sejmik of the Greater Poland Voivodeship (regional parliament) than Law and Justice (PiS), the party that holds power in Poland along with two coalition partners (as The United Right).

Participants came mainly from Poznań, the capital of Greater Poland Voivodeship, and three small towns in the region, Grodzisk Wielkopolski, Puszczykowo and Września. It is an essential feature of the surveyed sample and the protests in Poland in general, which are discussed here. After 22 October in Poland, protests were organised with similar commitment and momentum in large cities (e.g. Warsaw, Kraków, Wrocław, Poznań) and hundreds of small towns. The collected empirical material allowed us to gain insight into the

² Leaving aside the paradigmatic assumptions presented by the authors, confirmation of these words can be found in numerous scientific publications on the specificity of emotions. See, for example, Dalgleish and Power, 1999; Deonna and Teroni 2012; Feldman Barrett, Levis, Haviland-Jones, 2018; Robinson, Watkins, Harmon-Jones, 2003; Strongman, 2003.

spaces of protest in the big city and small-town sub-worlds.

The contestants digitally prepared their written reports and submitted them via e-mail attachments to facilitate their importation into qualitative data analysis (QDA) software. We conducted our analysis using MAXQDA 2020 software. Following the principles of phenomenological insight, we mapped emotionality and rationality in selected areas of protest in an attempt to demonstrate possible common and boundary (liminal) spaces (Turner, 1969; Martin, 1985) that are potential bases for the formation of new norms, values, and patterns of behaviour. The three areas of interest that we will discuss are motivation to participate in the protests, the course of the protests, and the assessment of the potential impact of protests on the future of Polish society.

Results

Most of the statements of the contestants ($n = 11 / N = 12$) were characterised by a strong emotional charge, which largely reflected the reality of the protests. In our analyses, we use an extended set of shades/descriptions of emotions, primarily mixed, based on the theory of Robert Plutchick (1980) and the works of his followers (cf. Jarymowicz, Imbir, 2010).

Positively charged emotions that appeared in the accounts of the participants of the protests were: acceptance, pride, tenderness, enthusiasm, euphoria, happiness, safety, empathy, love, hope, optimism, excitement, consolation, pleasure, amusement, trust, emotion, and kindness. Contrarily, emotions with a negative charge present in the participants' narratives include aggression, helplessness, frustration, desperation, wrath, anxiety, aversion, hatred, hopelessness, uncertainty, unease, dissatisfaction, insult, indignation, agitation, gloom, terror, disappointment, irritation, despair, sadness, sarcasm, fear, trepidation, offence, resentment, unbalance, hostility, rage,

anger, and impatience. A particular moderation characterised one of the works submitted to the competition in presenting his position (C5, male, did not specify his age). This competition statement (in terms of emotionality) was distinguished by specific neutrality and distance towards norms and values related to the protest and actions taken during the protests, strangeness, indifference, and restraint.

In the second dimension of interest to us (i.e. rationality), we noticed a much lower intensity of reflections presented by the contestants. Nevertheless, such content appeared in all works. The spectrum of thoughts expressed here ranged from reflections on personal life (remaining beyond the scope of our interest) through comments related to the motives for participating in protests, the course of the protests themselves, assessments of the reality surrounding the protests (including the COVID-19 pandemic), and opinions on the chances of introducing changes and visions of the future of Polish society after the protests to assessments of the politicisation of the protests and features of the Polish political scene.

Motivation for taking part in protests

Responding to the prompt, "Describe as accurately as possible the reasons why you took part in these protests," the contestants indicated strong emotional backgrounds to their decisions. These were dominated by desperation, wrath, dissatisfaction, insult, indignation, and resentment but still coexisted with enthusiasm, hope, and sarcasm. Additionally, there was impatience, unbalance, disappointment, frustration, sadness, despair, unease, and fear. Following are examples of statements of this type:

(...) In theory, I should be used to it – on 7 January 1993, the men in suits made a

"compromise" with the men in cassocks, whereby women's rights were sold in exchange for consolidating power. One day women ceased to be human beings and became fetus bags, and at the same time, 1.7 million signatures of citizens demanding an abortion referendum were thrown away. When I was four years old, I became an incubator. On 22 October 2020, I also became a coffin – if I get pregnant and it turns out that the fetus has a lethal defect, I will have to carry the pregnancy and watch the agony of a child that cannot be saved, or I will have to wait until the fetus dies inside me. On 27 January, the verdict was published, so it took effect (C11, female, 31 years old).

(...) People have shown that they really have had enough, that they are desperate and will not hesitate to sacrifice even their own freedom in defence of the freedom of others (...) we are not laying down our arms and we will fight until the law is on the side of women (C1, male, 35 years old).

(...) I felt like I had been punched in the face. I felt betrayed in some way. Weeping, I took the tram, then the bus. Finally, I entered the house crying. My boyfriend was horrified. I could barely tell him what had happened. That same day we went to our first protest (C4, female, 30 years old).

(...) I took part in the protests out of fear, the need to speak my mind out loud and to show solidarity with other women and everyone for whom this situation is hard in some way (C8, female, 25 years old).

We also noted many rational interpretations of the reasons for participating in the protests. These included assessments of the government's actions revisiting the abortion topic during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the obvious need for civic activism, women's right

to make decisions about their bodies, representing all women who have been wronged, and the desire to bring about a change in government.

(...) I would like to see that through my and others' participation in protests, women have the right to decide about their bodies and their babies. That they have a choice, and whatever that choice is, they are not condemned and stigmatised by it (C7, female, 24 years old).

(...) I also realised that sooner or later, the government would once again take the draft tightening the law out of the "freezer", and unfortunately, as I predicted, it did so at a time when, as PiS politicians probably hoped, people would not protest. (...) I represent all the system victims who have not received justice by participating in the protest. Women who had to give birth to children sentenced to death. Women who have had to deal with trauma, women who have been forced into "heroism" only to end up destitute under a bridge somewhere (C1, male, 35 years old).

(...) However, I know that we cannot give up. We must finally bring down this government and look forward to better times! (C10, female, 50 years old).

Apart from the types of statements mentioned above, one should also pay attention to critical reflections on broadening the spectrum of reasons for the protest by its organisers. Such opinions, although rare, also appeared in the statements of the contest participants. Here is an example:

(...) While at the beginning everyone was at the protest for the same reason, later the reasons were various, and this required clarification. The longer the protests went on, the broader the demands became, presumably

that more people could find themselves within one growing group. However, the effect was different – people who did not want to support all the demands started to get discouraged and left (C3, female, 33 years old).

Criticism of the Polish political scene, provided among the rational reasons for participating in protests, was sometimes combined with the emotional sphere, creating boundary territories. For example, in the following quotation, criticism co-occurs with sarcasm. In other statements of this kind, criticism coexists with disappointment and anger.

(...) The reasons why I took part in these demonstrations were, first of all, restricting my freedom. How much can you put up with the fact that men in their sixties decide matters concerning women in this country and, unfortunately, in many others? (C6, female, 44 years old).

Note here that the motivations for participating in the protests of all activists (n=10/ N=12) who participated in the competition were embedded in individual biographies and were related to both previous involvement in various protest actions and personal life experiences. Here are some examples of such statements:

(...) I have been involved in protests, demonstrations or collecting signatures on various matters since I can remember. It all started in childhood – my friend and I were walking around the estate and then around the centre of Poznań, collecting signatures against taking horses to slaughter. We then ordered a package from the Viva! Foundation. In later years, I attended animal rights protests regularly. I was also at demonstrations against ACTA – a crowd of young people who care about something made me very happy.

Several years ago, at the Ethno Port festival, we collected signatures for accepting refugees with the Amnesty International group. At the same time, demonstrations of solidarity with refugees and Muslims from Poznań took place. Most clearly from that period, I remember the march under the banner of "Nationalism Will Not Pass" in 2017. It began in earnest with a raid of nationalists and the demolition of the main entrance to Stary Browar shopping centre. Back then, I had the feeling that something nasty was being born, but I also hoped that it would be nipped in the bud, and I would not have to protest more and more often. However, soon there were demonstrations in defence of the courts, such as cyclical, regular protests, the first I remember. There was also spring 2018 and the Black Umbrellas protest, which I followed from outside Poland (C4, female, 30 years old).

(...) In addition to rallies against the tightening of abortion laws, from 2016 to today, I have had the opportunity to participate in other forms of civil disobedience. These have included: actions under the common title Chain of Light, defending the independence and sovereignty of the Polish judicial system, walkouts organised by the Youth Climate Strike, meetings in support of the Teachers' Strike, a demonstration on Święty Marcin Street in Poznań in autumn 2019, where I showed my dissatisfaction against the draft law criminalising sex education, protest against the denunciation of the Geneva Convention, the "Rainbow does not offend us" event allied to LGBT+ people, who shortly before were dehumanised by President Andrzej Duda and labelled an "ideology", and the "We will not give the Bieszczady to the saws" protest challenging the logging of the Carpathian Primeval Forest, organised outside the Poznań headquarters of the Regional Directorate of State Forests on Gajowa Street (C12, female, 21 years old).

Course of protests

Among the many dimensions characterising the course of the protests, we analyse a few selected areas within the scope of our considerations: the content conveyed during the protests, the fears and anxieties associated with protests, and the perception of broader perspectives on the evaluation of protests and one's participation in them.

Participants indicated numerous emotions that appeared during the protests. Some of them they could identify and name, some revealed as the overtone of the statements. The group of positive emotions repeated here include, among others, the importance of the presence of family and friends during the demonstration, a feeling of safety, and visible energy for action present among everyone.

(...) We managed to find ourselves with a friend by the square, the speeches and then the march up to the cathedral and back to Młyńska Street: extraordinary energy for the whole 3 hours (...) On returning, I immediately told my husband that I felt as happy as after our wedding party. We laughed. I lay down around 1 am with powerful chanting echoes and various scenes from the demonstration in my head and a big smile on my face falling asleep momentarily (C2, female, 38 years old).

(...) What I like about my city is that I met friends at the protest without dating anyone for this protest, which made me feel safer (C9, female, 24 years old).

(...) There was youth energy at the demonstration. Techno was played, flares were set off. Then we went with this group of thousands for a march around the city (C10, female, 50 years old).

(...) There was amazing positive energy. Apart from locals, many participants came from surrounding villages and towns (C6, female, 44 years old).

In reporting on the demonstration course, contestants repeatedly drew attention to the empathetic behaviour of the protesters.

(...) Emergency corridors were created in a minute, for instance, next to the cathedral, when an ambulance wanted to reach the photographers treated with pepper gas (although in the crowd, we did not know it yet). They said someone had fainted – this is just one of many examples of pro-social and simply human, empathetic behaviour of the demonstrators" (C2, female, 38 years old).

(...) At one point, we had to create an emergency corridor for the ambulance – the other team greeted us warmly. We felt that we were marching not only on our behalf (C11, female, 31 years old).

(...) during my first protest in front of the basilica in Ostrów Tumski, one of the participants had an epileptic fit. The crowd instantly shared the news, parted ways and created a corridor through which paramedics and an ambulance could approach. I think the Poznań protesters showed great empathy with each other and courage, but not bravado (C12, female 21 years old).

Contestants made similar comments about people who did not participate in the protests but witnessed them (e.g. passers-by, drivers, residents of nearby buildings, employers).

(...) Both the AMU Rector and the academics conducting classes with me were mostly supportive, expressed understanding of the seriousness of the situation, hope and

encouragement towards other students and me, and supported the Student Women's Strike involving absence from classes (C12, female, 21 years old).

(...) Especially the residents of the tenement houses and, for example, the IKAR isolation centre, which was also on the route of the marches, showed great enthusiasm and ingenuity: from standing on balconies with banners and flags to co-chanting to flashing torches to the rhythm of the eight-star slogan. The support of so many residents was encouraging and energising (C2, female, 38 years old).

(...) It was almost night, and yet even the people who were not marching with us seemed to understand the anger. Drivers waited patiently, some honking to the rhythm of our words (C1, male, 35 years old).

(...) The participation of relatively older people also moved me. They stood in their windows or on balconies during the marches and waved to passers-by. It had a certain special significance for me and touched me. The support of older people, but also other people, gave a certain sense of unity. It was amazing how the crowd instantly became one, regardless of age or gender, and together they were ready to "fight" (C7, female, 24 years old).

Emotions with a negative tinge mostly referred to how attitudes towards the legal and political situation were affirmed during the protest (e.g. rage, wrath, anger, lack of hope, unease, fear, sadness). For many protesters, attendance at a demonstration was synonymous with showing rage and anger. Thus, contestants also referred to the public use of vulgarisms and uncensored slogans.

(...) I believe that this rage with me and hundreds of thousands of protesting women and their partners in Poland will no longer slow down because many limits of decency have been exceeded once again (C2, woman, 38).

(...) I believe that words serve to express, among others, our inner states adequately, so I have nothing against vulgarity during the protests in the context of being reasonably pissed off with the current situation (C8, woman, 25).

The protests also revealed emotions regarding reflections on agency, which manifested as expressions of lack of hope for the rapid and effective changes that the protesters loudly demanded.

(...) Unfortunately, I find it hard to believe that there will be any major changes soon (C1, male, 35 years old).

(...) It is certainly important to remain vigilant, rebel, even if it is without a chance, and protest, even if there is not much hope (C4, female, 30).

(...) I truly do not know if there is any hope for a better time... I am fed up with everything, restricting freedom, hitting human rights, the inability to reach agreement across divisions, and also human stupidity (C11, woman, 31).

Contestants often mentioned that they were afraid for their safety during the protest and the potential consequences of police detention or riots provoked by people who did not support the demonstration.

(...) I looked closely at every passer-by. I paid attention to the police cars. Knowing the situation in the larger cities, I feared that our demonstration would not be without some

disturbance. The hour we had to wait was an eternity for me (C1, male, 35 years old).

(...) And although I have never experienced anything unpleasant from the police after the journalists covered the protests in Warsaw, I was frankly afraid to attend the meetings in Poznań. It is unbelievable when "undercover officers" enter the crowd to strike blindly with batons. The protesters who were attacked, not understanding who was beating them, called the police for help. This situation left the strongest impression on me, although I knew it only from media reports. It was much more common to hear of protesters being unlawfully detained and taken far away from their place of detention and gas being used against peaceful demonstrations (C3, female, 33 years old).

(...) We did not feel safe anymore. Once right in front of us, the police used gas next to the cathedral; Kaczyński had set up a national guard to protect churches, nationalists were roaming around the city, there had already been some incidents (C4, female, 30 years old).

The protestors' reports, in which the contestants combine positive and negative emotions, are very interesting. They pertain to the observation of the course of the demonstration and the activities of participants, passers-by, the police, or people who did not support the demonstration and reflection on why the participants were at the centre of the events.

(...) Even though it was Sunday, there was much traffic on the streets, and in every street, especially around Freedom Square, there were several dozen police cars. In some places, there were even police on horseback. This sight made quite an impression on me and was somewhat disturbing. However, it was not unease directed at the police but rather

from the momentousness and seriousness of the situation. It was the moment I indeed understood the situation and where I was (C7, female, 24 years old).

(...) I had never felt such strong solidarity with women as when our hearts were breaking over our common cause. The first time I cried over something with a friend, we could not find the words, but we understood each other perfectly even without that (C4, female, 30 years old).

(...) I was shocked and touched but pleasantly. However, the only option was to use this capital as fuel for further action (C8, female, 25 years old).

Respondents also drew attention to the particular circumstances in which the protests took place, namely the pandemic. The awareness that they were taking a risk was present in them, but at the same time, they recognised what was at the heart of the matter.

(...) I am guessing, but I think many people were scared, we were scared too, but we did not see any other way out, our freedom and our rights came first, fear for health and life came down the line (C4, female, 30 years old).

(...) I expected something to change, that the voices of the thousands of people who were so pissed off that they took to the streets at the height of the pandemic would not be ignored (C9, female, 24).

(...) Politicians probably thought that the pandemic would effectively discourage people from taking to the streets. At the same time, the topic of tightening abortion laws would distract attention from the tragic situation in the country. However, women showed that they would not allow their right to decide about their bodies to be taken away from

them, and despite the bans, they took to the streets (C1, male, 35 years old).

The situation of the pandemic, despite the objective threat, did not discourage the respondents from participating in the protests. This fact was also analysed concerning rational actions: limiting the risk of potential infection (e.g. through use of social distance, masks) and such preparation of safeguards so that, despite the pandemic, the protest could be fully echoed (e.g. use of appropriate masks).

(...) However, bearing in mind the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic, my friends and I tried to keep to the side of the crowd to maintain a relative distance from other people. Of course, with such a large concentration of people, it was not possible, but we still had our health in mind and the health of other people. Throughout the protest, i.e. while standing and marching, my friends and I wore masks in line with the restrictions (C7, woman, 24).

(...) I had a mask on which I had drawn a red lightning bolt and a coat hanger. Upon returning home, I discovered that the paints had drained along with the moisture from my breath. So I ordered black masks with lightning bolts and the strike logo on them to be better prepared next time (C11, female, 31 years old).

(...) As for the sanitary regime in both protests, it was respected. People without masks were rare. The leaders of the protests reminded people to wear them – I also witnessed a situation in which a young girl pointed out to a woman who did not have a mask that she should have one. I think that the protests' participants' behaviour was correct (C9, female, 24 years old).

Assessing the potential impact of protests on Polish society in the future

Rationality prevailed in the reflections on the impact of the protests on Polish society in the future. Presumably, this resulted from both a retrospective analysis of the participants' own actions and the development of protests in Poland. We obtained the data discussed below by asking the following questions: "What do you think will happen next? What will be the immediate and more distant consequences of the protests?"; "How do you imagine Poland after the end of the protests?"; "What kind of Poland are you fighting for?"; "What change do you expect?"

Among the rational remarks, we note a lack of faith in changes in the short term and a lack of faith in changes in general. Protesters' scepticism against the possibility of introducing changes they are striving for was also accompanied by comments on the expected increase in radicalism and further polarisation of Polish society.

(...) I would very much like this tremendous movement to bring about a change that happened, for example, in Iceland. I want a change in the law, but not only on abortion. I want a man in the centre, I want governments of people who care about citizens and Poland, I want a debate and respect in this debate. I want many similar things. Nevertheless, I do not believe in any of them. Somewhere in the back of my heart, I have only a tiny hope that any of this can be implemented. Maybe not like in Iceland, maybe not in the form of a coup. Maybe at least gradually, step by step, like a sprouting seed. However, I fear that the energy will burn out, the protests will stop, and either nothing will change, or nothing will change at all (C3, female, 33 years old).

(...) I imagine Poland to be even more divided after the protests. By the way, I can see that my views are radicalising. Just as a few years ago, I would have stood somewhere in the crowd at a protest, now I can imagine that my frustration would translate into helping to organise such a protest or speaking at it because there is much anger in me. Once the protests are over, there will be more solidarity on both pro-lifer and pro-abo sides. I would like to imagine a Poland where people who want to terminate pregnancies and doctors who perform these procedures will not live in constant fear. Poland, where everyone has access to adequate health care and pro-life means caring for the living disabled and providing them with opportunities to live an active life in society, and not ordering women to be incubators and condemning them and their potential children to suffer. (...) I would like to imagine such a Poland – full of solidarity and support. However, when I am treated as a person who is too stupid to know how to exercise my rights and if I received them, I would undoubtedly abuse them, I do not know if I can (C9, female, 24 years old).

This is a trend of pessimistic considerations. However, it was counterbalanced by clearly optimistic predictions. In this area, the statements focused on visions of a free democratic society, the possibilities of implementing changes in the long term, the expansion of the social capital of Polish society through an increase in the number of (mainly young) activists, changes in Poles' awareness of their own agency (which is actively occurring) and the perception of transitions in the consciousness of Poles as a catalyst for change for the better.

(...) In all this, however, I see the prospect of change at a somewhat more distant date. The Women's Strike has shown a force to be

reckoned with in our country. That force is women, and they can strongly tip the balance of power in the next elections. The parties will finally have to consider the demands that have been pushed aside for many years because it was claimed that there were more important issues that needed to be addressed. Nevertheless, the protests hitting the current government show that the public is fed up with this approach (C1, male, 35 years old).

(...) In the long run, the social capital, which is so low compared with the countries of Western Europe (especially Scandinavia and Germany), may finally increase. I hope for it because Poland needs young activists who constantly think about others and treat it as obvious (C2, female, 38 years old).

(...) For the moment, it seems that these protests have mainly contributed to a reflection on the current government and how they exercise power. I think this is precisely one of the first steps towards a change for the better. Society is becoming more aware, and I am not just talking about political or ideological issues but also about changing, for example, attitudes towards health, nutrition, or consumerism. We are becoming aware of our power to influence the reality around us. At the same time, this affects a distant change. Perhaps the protests have proved to the society, and above all to the authorities, that we can mobilise and fight together for our own good (C7, female, 24 years old).

In terms of emotional assessments of the potential impact of protests on Polish society in the future, their presence was marked by pride, enthusiasm, euphoria, optimism, excitement, consolation, trust, terror, fear and trepidation.

(...) I believe that after this wave of protests, it will not be the same again – that people will dare to fight for themselves and demand more from the authorities. I hope that this will contribute to the creation of local civic communities, especially in smaller towns. Furthermore, of course – I believe that abortion will be legal and the fundamentalist activity will be marginalised (C8, female 25).

(...) Whether the revolution will overthrow PiS in the near or longer term, it has already happened in our minds: women and young people have gained a sense of agency (many for the first time in their lives), especially as organisers of various forms of protest – both in metropolitan areas and tiny towns (which I admire most, especially one-person protests), of sisterhood and real solidarity, especially in Warsaw in the face of police violence and arrests (C2, female, 38 years old).

(...) I am afraid that the viciousness against LGBT people and other minorities will intensify and unleash even more aggression and acts of violence than before. I am afraid that we will go the way of Hungary and that media pluralism will completely disappear. I am afraid that police violence will become part of the routine actions of officers against citizens. I am afraid of the impunity of those in power and that they will do everything to remain in power at our expense (C8, female, 25 years old).

In assessing the potential impact of protests on the shape of Polish society in the future, we also noted the emergence of boundary (liminal) spaces. The transitions from pride and enthusiasm towards the protesters' actions to rational assessments of the change in the consciousness of Polish women in the sphere of women's emancipation should be indicated here. We also noted the transitions from enthusiasm and optimism connected

with building solidarity between people in the reality of the protest to rational evaluations of creating new relations in local communities. Lastly, we noted transitions from rational assessments of changes in political awareness of young Poles (the effect of protests) to moderate enthusiasm towards potential changes at the helm of power in Poland. Examples of such statements are quoted below:

(...) There has also been massive progress towards women's emancipation, especially in politics, where the leaders of the Women's Strike showed for the first time to the public that they do not have to reckon with the opinion of dziaders³ tending to instruct them. Social support for protests and abortion in Poland reached an unprecedented level. I think most Polish women realised with great power their inalienable right to self-determination (C2, female, 38 years old).

(...) I believe that the protests will result in civic engagement. People should get active in different fields. One will choose a running club, another an ecology, it could be anything. This will create bonds that are missing and continue to disappear, influenced by the nightmare of the pandemic. If we rebuild social trust, we can unite on many issues. That fire of hope in me remains. It is my private dream fruit of the protests" (C6, female, 44 years old).

(...) I hope that the Constitutional Court's judgment has awakened the dormant masses of people with the right to vote, both active and passive. That before the next parliamentary elections, more people will positively consider the possibility of taking part in them, and

³ Dziaders: contemptuously a man, usually influential, who treats women (rarely: young people) in a disrespectful, patronising, object-like manner, displaying a sense of superiority. A term popularised during the protests.

thus the possibility of electing a new ruling party, since we protest so vigorously against the current one (C12, female, 21 years old).

Discussion and conclusions

The most general background for the rationality of individuals' actions is the social context. From a particular community member, participation in civil protests – regardless of the motivation – is rational. While emotions usually refer to direct reactions to the circumstances that have arisen, the rationality of actions also means the awareness of the consequences of the decisions made. An individual must define the conditions of the rationality of his participation in collective social activities (Olson, 1965; Noguera, 2007, p.108). So, we are dealing here with a clear process of emotion turning into rationality. The emotional reaction to the government's decisions implies the necessity to take action on the issue we are interested in, protests, which become rational. People go out to the street not only on their behalf but on behalf of the collective. This is all the more important as, according to Mancur Olson's concept, not all individuals are willing to take action for the collective. However, at the same time, they are willing to take advantage of the positive consequences of the actions of those individuals who are willing to do so (Paramio, 2005, pp. 17–18, 20).

The reasons for participating in the protests reflect the tendencies outlined above. We will draw here on elements of Alfred Schütz's (1967) theory and his understanding of the notions of "in-order-to-motives" that are oriented towards future action and "because-of-motives" that refer to past experiences. While discussing the protesters' course of actions, participants emphasised the domination of emotionality on the side of in-order-to-motives. Their retrospective analysis of the because-of-motives, on the other hand, indicated the rational basis

of their actions. References to previous experiences and events prevailed here. Especially in the case of activists (n = 10/N = 12), we noted a strong reinforcement of the motivation to participate in protests in their biography. While in the concept of Alfred Schütz referred to here, the in-order-to-motives are always combined with the because-of-motives, in this case, we observed a clear shift of emphasis from the emotionality of the former to the rationality of the latter. Furthermore, it was the rationality of participating in the protests, not the emotionality of the protesters often exposed in the media, that was responsible for the unprecedented social strength of the protests against the tightening of abortion laws.

Nevertheless, the contestants usually described participation in the protests from an emotional level. They were indicated directly or revealed themselves only in the broader context of the analysed events. Many respondents also observed the emotions determining the motives for participating in the protests among other co-demonstrators. Thus, the collective nature of the rebellion was emphasised. It has been repeatedly pointed out that protest is not so much a law as it is an obligation to fight for those who, for various reasons, cannot or do not want to protest. Expressions of solidarity with those affected by the protesters' demands, primarily women, indicated a broader dimension of the chanted slogans. At the same time, a fight for the rights of future mothers, women who terminated their pregnancies, families struggling with the difficulty of raising terminally ill children, and others was declared. The presence of men at the demonstrations was an expression of their solidarity with their partners. The emotional attitude of the men to the protest was emphasised by the fact that they were often silent public supporters who did tasks like carrying a banner with a slogan, taking care of safety needs, showing tenderness, and the

like. Observations of such actions allow for the interpretation that men leave the final decision regarding the termination of pregnancy to women. Their participation in these demonstrations and in our competition may also indicate changes in socialisation. The mere presence of topics related to social and cultural education due to gender differentiation (or despite this differentiation) in the public discourse means that sexuality and rights to it, as well as reproduction and its determinants, are perceived differently. These issues are related to sexual education, which the competition participants drew attention to in their works, namely its shortcomings and deficiencies. For example, in the field of knowledge about contraception, one consequence of deficient education is unwanted pregnancies. In the reports of the contestants, some of whom were parents, there were also references to the process of socialisation, e.g. explaining the protest situation to the children or interpreting the meaning of the protest while taking into account their perception capabilities.

Contest participants pointed to the enthusiasm and visible energy of the protesters. It should be combined with a sense of agency in one regard and with solidarity in another. Even if it is not crowned with the expected changes in the law, efficiency manifests itself in the awareness that the rebellion itself, the protest itself, and loud shouting of one's oppositional views are effective. The result is reported in the media (including foreign media), through interviews, talks among relatives, and the opinions of politicians from various sides of the political scene. The effect is, therefore, the very fact that the protests did not go unnoticed. Solidarism, on the other hand, may refer to a sense of community, specifically via responsibility for those who do not protest, do not dare to express their opinion, and also support for protesters in entirely different spaces like social media, in discussions with loved ones, and by wearing

symbols of protest (in this case, red lightning). These expressions of support and solidarity – seen during the demonstrations – kept the motivation and enthusiasm for the fight at a constantly equal, high level. With time, especially after the publication of the judgment, the enthusiasm for protests diminished, and it was channelled into other areas, mainly on the Internet. What is left is a sense of collectivism that emphasises that the issue is not only about women but also the interest of society to find appropriate solutions to abortion.

Among the negative emotions indicated by the contestants, rage and anger predominated. They were expressed by the presence at the demonstration, loudly shouting slogans, and displays of self-made banners. Slogans on banners and those articulated were often uncensored and vulgar. Research participants drew attention to this in their narratives. Initial fear, mixed feelings, or even aversion to such forms of communication gave way with time to their acceptance. Rationality in this respect was manifested in situations where protesters tried not to swear in the presence of children. In the respondents' messages, there were reflections that the use of vulgarisms in the public space was connected with the feeling of crossing a specific limit. Symbolically, it was understood that the authorities crossed all boundaries by publishing the judgment of the Constitutional Tribunal, thus authorising the protesters to use strong, often vulgar words.

Transitions from emotionality to rationality fostered the creation of boundary spaces. Their liminality became one of the most significant features of the actions undertaken by protesters. We have in mind here the theatricalisation and carnivalisation of protest (e.g. stagings using costumes from the film adaptation of Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale", musical settings of protests, dance, and the like), humour and satire, as well as the bluntness/vulgarity of the slogans proclaimed.

These had previously been essentially absent from both the discourse on such a serious topic and the demonstrations associated with it. Within the protests in question, new spaces of resistance were taking shape, both ambiguous and diverse, as well as coherent and defined, if we were to adapt and paraphrase David Muggleton's (2002, p. 73) analysis of liminal subcultures here. During the protests, their space became just such a (sub)cultural niche with a distinctly liminal character remaining (...) *literally on the border, in no man's land, between clearly defined social identities* (Martin, 1985, p. 50). Such specific ephemera and non-stereotypical forms of action eluded any classification and effectively prevented their social strength from being pacified both by those in power (in the ideological sense) and law enforcement (in specific events in the streets of Polish cities).

The second area of liminality was activated on the borderline between the protest and the local community. It was a space of impulses dynamising a potential transitional phase in the social change process. The (sub)culture of protest became "liminal" in introducing functional disturbances into the local communities it entered. Previous norms and values were violated, undermined, and mocked in the course of, as it might seem, fun and carnival forms of activity, leading to profound shocks in local social sub-worlds. According to Victor Turner's concept, there is a cyclical process in local communities. Other alternative forms (*communitas*) emerge between the typical forms of community that are more concrete, direct, spontaneous, non-institutionalised, and non-abstract (cf. Turner, 1969). As their participants pointed out in their accounts, the protests we are interested in undoubtedly had this feature.

The categories of emotionality and rationality were most evident in the descriptions of the courses of protests. It poses a fundamental research challenge for interpretative research, as

narratives based on feelings or intuition, which are what we were dealing with in the vast majority, are not always easy to analyse in the paradigms accepted by science. Using the assumptions of the grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 2009) and interpretative anthropology (Geertz, 1973), we emphasise that it is necessary to establish directions for interpretation that directly refer to the observations about the phenomena under study created by the participants of social reality themselves. In the competition material, which is the core of the data analysis, we find precisely these personal references to emotions and rationality that accompanied the respondents during the protests. The context in which the protesters had to vent their emotions and attempts to identify rational actions is universal. The pandemic affected all countries globally, and civil liberties were limited everywhere. Fear of leaving the house has repeatedly given way to emotions of anger and a sense of community solidarity. Analysing the descriptions of the protests, one can see how high the level of dissatisfaction and rage was, that despite the restrictions related to the pandemic, people decided to demonstrate. An additional feature indicating the universal nature of the protests is its central theme, the right to legal abortion. The issue of abortion has appeared and continues to appear in the public debates of many countries. The effect of these discussions varies. Nevertheless, looking at what took place in autumn and winter 2020/21 in Poland, we forecast that contemporary societies are aware of their participation in decision-making processes that it will be difficult not to take these aspects into account when creating legislation. Proof of this was the rejection by a large majority (361 out of 421 voters) of the Polish Parliament (including 155 members of the ruling party), the civic bill "Stop abortion," completely prohibiting the termination of pregnancy in Poland, which took place on 2 December 2021. 🗓

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Emocjonalność i racjonalność uczestniczek kobiecych protestów obywatelskich w Polsce (przypadek województwa wielkopolskiego)

Abstrakt

Po ogłoszeniu przez Trybunał Konstytucyjny RP, 22 października 2020 roku, wyroku w sprawie planowania rodziny, ochrony płodu ludzkiego i warunków dopuszczalności przerywania ciąży, przez Polskę przetoczyła się ogromna fala protestów obywatelskich. W ich trakcie pojawiły się nowe przestrzenie wyrażania niezadowolenia i oporu wcześniej nieobecne podczas protestów przeciwko zastrzaniu przepisów prawnych dotyczących aborcji. Ich innowacyjność w znacznej mierze opierała się na tworzeniu obszarów granicznych, swoją liminalnością wyraźnie wykraczających poza subświat protestów. Szczególną rolę w tym procesie odgrywały relacje pomiędzy emocjonalnością i racjonalnością podejmowanych przez protestujących działań. Niniejszy tekst stanowi próbę diagnozy zasygnalizowanych powyżej tendencji.

Słowa kluczowe: protesty obywatelskie, emocjonalność, racjonalność, liminalność, pandemia COVID-19.