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Building Bridges Across Borders: The Transnational Impact of Polish Feminism in the UK

Abstract: This article explores the dynamic realm of transnational feminist activism, focusing on the contributions of Polish feminists in the United Kingdom. It delves into the profound ways in which these activists have engaged with and influenced the broader feminist movement within their host country. The article begins by contextualizing the rise of transnational cooperation among feminist groups, underscoring the universal relevance of issues such as violence against women, systemic discrimination, and reproductive rights. Central to this exploration is the significant wave of Polish migration to the UK post-2004, leading to a substantial Polish diaspora actively participating in feminist dialogues. This participation is further amplified by key political events in Poland, particularly in 2016 and 2020, which saw attempts by the Polish government to restrict reproductive rights, igniting protests and mobilization among Polish feminists both domestically and in the diaspora. The article provides an in-depth analysis of the multifaceted feminist activism of Polish migrants in the UK, which extends beyond the realm of reproductive rights to broader feminist and pro-democracy activities. This intersectional approach not only enriches their activism but also facilitates the exchange of ideas, strategies, and resources, creating a robust network of support and action that transcends national boundaries. Through qualitative methodologies, including in-depth ethnographic interviews with feminist activists, this study reveals the complexities of operating within transnational social fields, negotiating multiple identities, and engaging

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in feminist activism across borders. The findings highlight the strategic vision of Polish feminists in the UK, their responsiveness to socio-political changes in Poland, and their significant role in shaping global feminist discourses and strategies.

Keywords: transnational feminism, feminist movements, intersectionality, migration

Introduction

The recent transformation of feminist activism into a landscape characterized by transnational collaborations represents a pivotal shift in the global fight for gender equality. This evolution, best exemplified by movements such as the International Women's Strike, underscores a growing consciousness within feminist circles of the deeply interconnected nature of their struggles, transcending national and cultural boundaries. This movement, which saw women from various countries uniting in a day of protest, symbolizes the shared commitment to challenging gender inequality worldwide.

This growing trend towards transnational cooperation between feminist groups is fuelled by the recognition of the global nature of gender inequalities. Despite the diversity in cultural and social contexts, issues such as violence against women, systemic discrimination, and the infringement of reproductive rights are universally pertinent. The collective response to these issues reflects a shared understanding that the fight for gender equality is a global one, requiring solidarity and collaborative efforts across nations.

The fight for reproductive rights has seen various feminist groups from different countries rallying around shared goals. The struggle against restrictive abortion laws, for instance, has not been confined to any one country. From the battle over abortion rights in Poland to the fight to repeal the Eighth Amendment in Ireland, these campaigns have drawn support and solidarity from feminist groups and activists across the globe. This global dimension of reproductive rights campaigns is a testament to the shared challenges women face, regardless of their geographical location.

This article delves into a distinct facet of transnational feminist activism by centring on the experiences and contributions of migrant feminists, with a special focus on Polish feminists in the United Kingdom. The choice of this focus is driven by multiple compelling factors.

Since the significant wave of Polish migration post-2004, with the UK being one of the primary destinations, the Polish diaspora has established itself as a substantial and influential community. The UK's Polish diaspora is substantial in numbers and increasingly integrated into the fabric of British society. The Polish diaspora's growing presence and integration into British society have had profound implications for both the UK and the transnational feminist

movement. As these migrants navigate life in a new country, they confront and engage with different gender norms and feminist traditions. This engagement enriches both the local and global feminist discourse, as ideas and strategies are exchanged and reconfigured in these cross-cultural interactions.

The urgency and relevance of focusing on Polish feminist activists in the UK, particularly in the wake of significant political developments in Poland in 2016 and 2020, cannot be overstated. These years marked pivotal moments in the contemporary history of Poland's feminist movement, with the conservative government's attempts to restrict reproductive rights igniting widespread protests across the nation. The government's actions, perceived as an assault on women's autonomy and a regression of hard-won freedoms, triggered a profound response, not only within Poland but also among the Polish diaspora worldwide, especially in the United Kingdom.

This period saw an unprecedented surge in feminist activism among Polish migrants in the UK, particularly among women. The activism was not a mere echo of the protests back home; rather, it was a dynamic, multifaceted movement that addressed a range of issues both relevant to their homeland and reflective of their experiences in the UK. Polish feminist activists in the UK mobilized in solidarity with their counterparts in Poland, organizing protests, information campaigns, and support networks. They campaigned vigorously against the restrictive measures proposed by the Polish government, using various platforms to raise awareness and garner international support for the cause.

However, their activism extended beyond the realm of reproductive rights in Poland. The Polish feminists in the UK also engaged actively in broader feminist and pro-democracy activities within their host country. Their efforts often intersected with those of other feminist groups in the UK, leading to the formation of a rich tapestry of collaborative and solidarity-driven initiatives. This intersectionality not only enriched their activism but also allowed for a more inclusive and diverse feminist movement in the UK. It facilitated the exchange of ideas, strategies, and resources, creating a robust network of support and action that transcended national boundaries.

The collaboration between Polish feminist activists in the UK and other feminist groups underscores the importance of transnational solidarity in the face of global challenges to women's rights. It demonstrates how feminist struggles in one country can resonate and find echoes in other parts of the world, leading to a strengthened, more cohesive global feminist movement. These collaborative efforts are pivotal in challenging systemic gender inequalities and advocating for a more democratic and inclusive society.

In essence, the increased level of feminist activism among Polish migrants in the UK, catalyzed by political events in Poland, represents a critical juncture in the transnational feminist movement. It highlights the role of migrant communities in shaping global feminist discourses and strategies and underscores

the interconnectedness of feminist struggles across the world. The experiences of Polish feminist activists in the UK provide valuable insights into the dynamics of transnational feminist activism and the potential for cross-border collaborations in advancing gender equality and democratic freedoms. Thus, the focus of this analysis is on the dual contexts of Polish feminism in the UK and the feminist practices of the Polish diaspora living in the UK. This perspective aims to highlight the interactions between localised feminist movements and the broader, transnational engagements shaped by global feminist discourses. It is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of how localised feminist strategies within the UK are informed by, and in turn influence, broader transnational feminist movements. This approach not only enhances the clarity of the research, but also enriches the academic discourse on transnational feminism by providing a detailed exploration of how feminist ideologies traverse and transform across national borders, adapting to and influencing different socio-political landscapes.

This phenomenon raises several critical research questions: First, how have Polish feminist migrants in the UK navigated and contributed to the broader feminist movement within their host country? Second, what strategies and approaches have they employed to address both the concerns specific to their community and the wider issues affecting women globally? Finally, in what ways has the Polish feminist movement built bridges across borders with international feminist networks? Exploring these questions will offer valuable insights into the character, strategies, and directions of the transnational feminist activism of Polish women in the UK, shedding light on the broader dynamics of migrant participation in global social movements.

Data, methodology, and ethical concerns

Empirical research focusing on transnational feminist activism often employs qualitative methodologies, like in-depth interviews, which are crucial in capturing the nuanced experiences of Polish feminist activists in the UK. These narratives reveal the complexities of operating within transnational social fields, negotiating multiple identities, and engaging in feminist activism across borders.

This study is based on in-depth ethnographic interviews with feminist activists who are members of various Polish organisations in the UK, both formal and informal, with a focus on women's rights activism. The interviews, conducted in Polish, took place mainly in London, but also in Manchester, Liverpool and Edinburgh, reflecting the geographical spread of these organisations.

The fieldwork took place in October and November 2023 and involved 21 activists engaged in 10 formal and informal Polish organisations and collectives in the UK whose main or one of their objectives is to support women.

The majority of these interviews were conducted online (15 in total), with the remainder conducted face-to-face, tailored to the needs and preferences of the interviewees. The demographic profile of the activists interviewed is predominantly young and middle-aged, educated women, aged 21–60, who are migrants with settled status in the UK, and some with British citizenship. They have been active in the UK for at least three years. The interviews were transcribed and analysed to identify themes related to feminist activism and transnational collaboration. I personally translated the interview extracts into English to ensure accuracy of presentation.

The primary method used in this study was narrative analysis. This approach is well established in qualitative research and focuses on stories as either the main data or the end result of the research. It is particularly relevant in migration studies where personal narratives provide insights into otherwise inaccessible experiences (Hagan, 2014). In this study, narratives helped to understand how activists form transnational networks and the variety of actions they undertake. Narrative analysis is based on the idea that people give meaning to their experiences through their stories (Schütz, 1972), and these stories help to organise and interpret these experiences.

The study also carefully considered ethical issues. Research involving people requires that their anonymity and confidentiality be protected. However, due to the public nature of the activists' work, complete anonymity was a challenge. In my multiple roles as researcher, observer and supporter of migration-related events, I maintained a clear distinction between the insider (emic) and outsider (etic) perspectives in data interpretation.

Concepts and frameworks

Transnational feminism in the context of transnational migration

Transnational feminist activism, as a component of the broader discourse on transnational migration, encapsulates a dynamic and multifaceted field of study, intertwining the complexities of gender, migration, and political engagement across national boundaries.

The transnationalism theory, as laid out by scholars such as Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc (1992), provides a crucial starting point. Their pioneering work elucidates how migrants create and maintain multiple ties across national borders, encompassing economic, social, and political aspects. This framework helps in understanding the dual or multi-faceted lives led by Polish feminist activists in the UK, who navigate and negotiate their identities and activism within and across the boundaries of Poland and the UK. Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller's (2004) further development of this concept

into the idea of 'transnational social fields' is particularly relevant. Their perspective highlights how these activists are simultaneously influenced by the gender norms and feminist discourses of both Polish and British contexts. This bifocal orientation shapes their activism, strategies, and identities in unique ways. The transformation of feminist activism into a transnational collaborative landscape is underpinned by various critical concepts and frameworks, reflecting a paradigm shift towards a more interconnected understanding of women's experiences and struggles across the globe. This shift, central to the concept of transnational feminism, challenges traditional nation-centric approaches, suggesting that women's experiences and the nature of gender oppression are shaped by a complex interplay of local and global factors (Mohanty, 2003). Mohanty's foundational understanding critiques the universalizing tendencies of Western feminism and calls for a more inclusive approach that acknowledges the diverse realities of women worldwide (Mohanty, 1988). Transnational feminism, as elaborated by Mohanty, involves a reorientation of feminist thought to encompass the diversity and complexity of global women's experiences. This reorientation includes recognizing how global processes like colonialism, neoliberalism, and globalization impact women differently across the world.

Transnational feminism also emphasizes the importance of solidarity and collective action, not based on assumed commonalities but rather on a conscious effort to understand and bridge differences. Hill and Kelly (1996) discuss building alliances sensitive to differences in power and privilege across and within societies, recognizing and working within the tensions and contradictions that arise from diverse cultural and political contexts. Furthermore, transnational feminism critiques the global economic order, bringing to light the intricate ways in which global economic structures disproportionately impact women, particularly in the Global South (Sassen, 2000). Sassen's work delves into the disproportionate impact of global economic policies on women, highlighting how these policies exacerbate vulnerabilities, particularly for women in less developed regions. Building upon Sassen's insights, Peterson (2018) explores the gendered ramifications of neoliberal ideologies, arguing that neoliberal global economic order has profound implications for gender equality. Fraser (2017) critically examines the relationship between feminism and capitalism, providing insights into how second-wave feminism, inadvertently, became entangled with neoliberal efforts. Tickner and Sjoberg (2013) contribute to this discourse by advocating for the inclusion of feminist perspectives in international relations and global politics, asserting the significance of understanding global power dynamics and international policy processes through a gender lens.

Transnational feminism asserts that the struggles for women's rights and gender equality are interconnected across global landscapes, influenced by cultural, social, and political factors that transcend national boundaries (Cabezas, Reese, Waller, 2015). This framework is particularly relevant for Polish transnational

feminism, where Polish women in the diaspora engage in cultural resistance, challenging and renegotiating traditional norms from a position of transnational solidarity, thereby creating new cultural meanings and practices.

Intersectionality

The integration of intersectionality within transnational feminist frameworks, as highlighted by Crenshaw (1989), marks a significant advancement in understanding the multifaceted nature of feminist activism. This approach is particularly relevant for Polish feminists in the UK, who navigate complex identities and experiences shaped by their transnational status. The theory of intersectionality allows for a nuanced exploration of how various identity factors, such as race, class, gender, and nationality, intersect and influence these women's activism and experiences. Nash (2019) expands upon Crenshaw's foundational work, emphasizing the critical role of intersectionality in transnational feminist discourse. Nash argues for an inclusive approach that considers multiple intersecting identity axes, which is vital for acknowledging the diverse and complex experiences of women globally. Similarly, Salem (2021) contributes to this discourse by examining how intersectionality addresses colonialism, racism, and global inequalities. Salem advocates for an anticolonial perspective within intersectionality, highlighting the need to recognize the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism on women's lives. This approach is crucial for understanding how colonial legacies continue to influence gender relations and feminist activism globally. Moreover, hooks (2000) provides an essential understanding of intersectionality's role in feminist theory. Her exploration of how intersecting oppressions like sexism, racism, and classism affect women's lived experiences, especially those of women of colour, is critical for comprehending the complexities of women's lives in a globalized context.

In this article, the intersectionality of transnational activism of Polish feminists in the UK is not only examined in its own right but also in relation to their engagement in broader movements. These include the struggle for democracy in Poland and the mobilization movement in the election campaign preceding elections in Poland. This intersectional lens reveals how Polish feminists in the UK contribute uniquely to these movements, influenced by their dual engagement in both their homeland's politics and their host country's feminist activism. Their activism, informed by their experiences as migrants, adds a distinct dimension to these movements, bridging geographical and cultural divides. This cross-national engagement illustrates the complex ways in which intersectionality manifests in feminist activism, underscoring the importance of considering multiple, overlapping identities and experiences in understanding and supporting transnational feminist movements.

The transnational feminist activism of Polish migrants in the UK can be understood through a rich tapestry of theoretical perspectives and empirical research. This intersection of transnationalism, and intersectionality provides a comprehensive framework for exploring the unique experiences and contributions of these activists. Such an analysis not only contributes to the broader understanding of transnational feminist activism but also highlights the specific dynamics of the Polish migrant community in the UK.

Results

Frames of transnational feminist bridges

The transnational dimension of the intersectional feminist activism of Polish migrant women in the UK encompasses a broad scope that involves interaction, cooperation, and alliance-building with feminist activists from other countries. Nevertheless, the central activities of Polish feminist activists in the UK are closely tied to the situation of women in Poland, and they exemplify a deep sense of solidarity and a desire to support and align with actions in their homeland. This immediate solidarity-driven mobilization of Polish women in the UK during the 2016 and 2020 protests reveals a strategic and emotionally charged response to gender-based issues in Poland, underlining the transnational nature of feminist activism.

One of the Polish feminist activists from London statement underscores a deliberate effort to attract international attention and local groups to the cause.

When there was the first Women's Strike in 2016, somewhere from the beginning there was a big emphasis on making sure that these protests attracted as many international audiences and local groups as possible. To show that abortion is an international issue, it's a women's issue all over the world and that it's not only in Poland that things are bad legally, but that there are also other groups, from other parts of the world, and also to share strategies and effectively observe what works in other countries, how activists in other countries work, and analyse it for their context, for the Polish context. (Activist 1)

This approach not only aimed to show support for women in Poland but also sought to highlight abortion as a global issue, transcending national boundaries. The emphasis on engaging international audiences and sharing strategies with activists from other countries indicates a recognition of the interconnectedness of women's struggles worldwide. This approach aligns with the perspectives offered by scholars like Chandra Talpade Mohanty in *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (2003), where the importance of solidarity across borders in feminist activism is emphasized.

Polish migrant feminists, through their unique positioning, often find common ground with activists from various migrant communities in the UK and feminist groups from abroad. This engagement with international groups from diverse cultural and geopolitical backgrounds indicates a profound understanding of the global dimensions of women's rights issues. By extending their network beyond the Polish community to include feminist groups from various parts of the world, this movement acknowledges the shared challenges and aspirations that unify women activists globally. This approach resonates with the concept of a 'global sisterhood,' a key theme in feminist literature, where solidarity transcends national and cultural boundaries. As the below statements shows, the collaboration of Polish abortion activists in the UK with their counterparts in Poland and international networks underscores a strategic and far-reaching approach to feminist solidarity and collective action.

In Abortion Without Borders we cooperate under this umbrella with activists in Poland, that is Women on the Web, Abortion Dream Team, Women Help Women this is also an international organisation, Auntie Basia and Abortion Network Amsterdam in the Netherlands. And this year we have been joined by a few more organisations, one of them is Auntie Wienia in Austria, another one is Auntie Czesia in the Czech Republic and SEJF also somewhere in Europe, they are in the Netherlands I think, but they also work internationally. And such a mix of collectives and just charities, official organisations. (Activist 12)

This collaboration between various collectives, charities, and official organizations forms a robust support system for women seeking abortion services, highlighting the crucial role of transnational alliances in addressing reproductive rights issues. The diversity of these groups, ranging from local collectives to international organizations, reflects a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted challenges associated with abortion access. This collaboration not only facilitates the sharing of resources and strategies but also amplifies the collective voice of these organizations, thereby enhancing their impact on both local and global scales.

A similar recollection made by another feminist activist, co-director of one of the Polish organization in London, demonstrates a recognition of the interconnectedness of women's struggles across different cultural and geopolitical landscapes.

Since 2016, on various occasions, we have worked with a number of non-Polish groups, from Northern Ireland, from the Republic of Ireland, from Chile, Argentina and generally with such groups of women activists from South America. We had contacts with Polish groups in Brussels or in France. There was also an initiative which was a series of meetings on Google Meet or some other platform under the slogan "Feminist wine across borders," which was the motto for these online meetings. (Activist 2)

The inclusion of diverse groups in these initiatives underlines the movement's commitment to addressing the global dimensions of women's rights issues. By uniting efforts across different countries and cultures, these activists acknowledge the shared challenges and aspirations that unite women activists globally. This approach is indicative of a movement that is not only responsive to the specific needs and challenges of the Polish diaspora but also deeply engaged in the broader global feminist discourse. The international initiative "Feminist wine across borders," as well as another initiative with international reach Polish Women's Council (Polonijna Rada Kobiet), just to mention only two out of many this kind, conducted through online platforms, symbolizes the innovative methods employed by these groups to maintain and strengthen their transnational connections. This resonates with the current trend in feminist activism where digital platforms play a pivotal role in fostering global networks and solidarity. The statements made by activists regarding their engagement in support and participation in feminist protests, illustrates a complex and multifaceted approach to advocating for women's rights, and reveal both the strategic underpinnings and the solidarity-driven ethos that characterize this form of activism.

One participant's account of the involvement with Irish feminist groups highlights this solidarity:

But there were a lot of female activists from Ireland always present at our protests, also from Northern Ireland. And we also tried to go and support them and go to the protests... (Activist 1)

This statement reflects a reciprocal relationship between Polish feminists in the UK and Irish feminist groups. The mutual participation in each other's protests, particularly outside embassies, is not just a gesture of support but also a strategic move to enhance the visibility and impact of their collective feminist agenda. The collaboration with groups such as London Irish Abortion Rights and Feminist Latin American Association indicates a broader alignment with feminist movements that transcend cultural and national boundaries.

The participant's mention of the annual counter-demonstration against the pro-lifers' march in London further exemplifies this transnational collaboration. The involvement of organizations like Brazil Matters, Feminist Fightback, and the British anti-fascist coalition in these counter-demonstrations points to an inclusive and intersectional approach to feminist activism. The Polish group's participation and sharing of Polish perspectives in such events underscore their commitment to a broader feminist movement that acknowledges and embraces diverse experiences and struggles. Another participant recalls the support extended to Irish feminist groups:

I think it was with these organisations from Northern Ireland and Ireland (...) Each of them in some way either came to our protests and for a speech, or I remember being at some of their protests... (Activist 1)

This account indicates a conscious effort to build alliances and support movements beyond their immediate community. The reference to the protest in front of the Irish embassy and the solidarity shown to Irish women seeking treatment in the UK highlights the empathetic understanding of shared struggles, particularly in the context of restrictive abortion laws influenced by religious doctrines.

The mention of Catholic religion as a common denominator in both Polish and Irish contexts further situates their activism within a larger socio-cultural framework. This shared religious background, often associated with conservative views on women's rights, particularly abortion, provides a common ground for these groups to unite their efforts against oppressive structures.

Another activist's reflection on the experience of solidarity –

It was really great and like such expressions of solidarity between these groups. It's known that there was a lot of international contacts between different groups, but when you experience something like that in person, there's a feeling that you're adding your own little brick to this huge explosion of solidarity in the feminist movement. (Activist 2)

– speaks to the emotional and affective dimensions of transnational feminist activism. This expression of solidarity is not just a strategic alliance but also a deeply felt connection between groups fighting for common causes, albeit in different cultural and political contexts. The sense of being part of a larger movement – “adding your own little brick to this huge explosion of solidarity in the feminist movement” – underscores the significance of individual and collective actions in contributing to the global feminist struggle. This experiential aspect of solidarity, where activists feel a tangible sense of contribution to a larger cause, aligns with sociological theories that emphasize the role of emotions in social movements. As theorized by Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta in *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (2001), emotions are a fundamental aspect of activist engagement and solidarity. The sense of joy, pride, and collective identity that comes from participating in transnational feminist activism can be a powerful motivator and sustainer of movement participation.

The transnational feminist activism of Polish women in Britain, particularly their collaboration and sense of solidarity with other feminist groups, is deeply rooted in shared experiences and common causes, as highlighted by the activists' statements. This connectivity, primarily centered around the fight for abortion rights, reveals both strategic underpinnings and a solidarity-driven ethos characteristic of this form of activism.

One activist notes:

The fight for abortion rights for women, in each of these countries, has started from the burial of women's rights and we share a common cause (Activist 4).

This underscores a shared struggle against restrictive reproductive rights policies, a key unifying factor for these groups. The collective fight against the erosion of women's rights forms the foundation of their collaboration, transcending geographical boundaries. This shared cause is not just a strategic alignment but also a deep empathetic understanding of each other's struggles, resonating with the concept of 'emotional solidarity' in social movements. Another research participant points out:

It is, above all, a common experience (...) finding common points, which can make this contact of each country important. But it is precisely the points of commonality which can cause that something that worked in Argentina, or worked in Ireland, to also work in Poland. (Activist 1)

This reflects a strategic approach where tactics and strategies successful in one context are adapted and applied in another. It speaks to the collaborative nature of transnational feminist activism, where learning and sharing across borders enhance the efficacy of each group's efforts.

The preference for solidarity with migrant groups from Ireland, South America, Spain over British women, as mentioned by one activist, indicates a closer alignment with groups facing similar struggles.

This alignment is often based on shared experiences of fighting restrictive policies in countries where Catholicism or other conservative ideologies have a strong influence on women's rights. The sense of understanding and solidarity with these groups likely stems from a shared cultural and religious background, as well as similar socio-political challenges related to women's rights, particularly in the realm of reproductive autonomy. The specificity of this focus creates a natural affinity with groups that have similar priorities. This is in contrast to the broader feminist agenda in the UK, which is perceived to encompass a wider range of issues.

So it's not that it's completely absent, but on a day-to-day basis (...) the feminists in the UK (...) no, we don't have much contact with them, maybe because the issues are different. I think in the UK there's more of an attitude that feminism is about everything, it's about the housing situation, it's about workers' rights, it's about issues that aren't just about women, and in Poland there's still a long way to go. And that's why the most natural contacts are with Ireland or with South American countries. (Activist 5)

The observation of the activist from London – member of the Polish a left-wing political party supporting the legalisation of abortion – that “in Poland there's still a long way to go” suggests that the immediacy and severity of

reproductive rights issues in Poland necessitate a more focused approach, leading to closer ties with groups dealing with similar urgent issues. Transnational feminist activism among Polish women in Britain are rooted in shared struggles and experiences, particularly regarding abortion rights. The collaboration is driven by both strategic considerations – learning from and adapting strategies that have been successful in similar socio-political contexts – and a deep sense of solidarity with groups facing analogous challenges. This transnational activism, therefore, is not just a collective response to common challenges but also an empathetic connection forged through shared experiences and struggles, exemplifying the power of solidarity and collaboration in the global feminist movement. By participating in global feminist movements Polish migrant feminist bring their unique experiences and perspectives to these movements, contributing to a more globally informed and culturally sensitive approach to feminist activism.

The transnational dimension of the activism of Polish migrant women in the UK is a testament to their ability to bridge cultural divides, build alliances across diverse migrant communities, and contribute to a more comprehensive and inclusive feminist discourse. Their activism not only addresses the specific concerns of Polish women, both in their homeland and abroad, but also aligns with and strengthens the broader global feminist movement, showcasing the power of solidarity and collaboration in driving social change.

Intersectional feminist bridges

In the context of transnational feminist activism, Polish activists in the UK exemplify a profound engagement with intersectionality, a concept that acknowledges the interconnected and overlapping nature of various social categorizations and systems of oppression.

Their activism often reflects their response to the socio-political environment of both their homeland and their host country. Their migrant status adds another layer to their activism. Polish migrant feminists often advocate for the rights of migrants in the UK, addressing issues such as discrimination, access to services, and fair employment practices. This is particularly relevant in the post-Brexit socio-political climate of the UK, where immigration has become a contentious issue. Their activism in this area is not just about policy change but also about changing societal attitudes towards migrants.

One activist articulates:

Women's rights are definitely a big topic and we've been to abortion protests this year (...) we are also interested in the migrant issue as we ourselves are migrants. (Activist 5)

This statement is not only a declaration of their active participation in women's rights movements, specifically in abortion protests, but also reveals their

deep understanding of the interconnectedness of gender and migration issues. Their self-identification as migrants adds a personal dimension to their activism, suggesting an intimate understanding of the unique challenges faced by migrant women. This dual focus on women's rights and migration issues underscores the intersectional nature of their activism, where gender and migration status are interlinked, shaping the experiences and struggles of individuals in complex ways.

The scope of their activism extends further, as another statement of a feminist activist engaged in a Polish organization in the UK reveals:

We started to see such an opportunity on the wave of the upsurge and the great organisation of women and LGBT people in Poland and in the UK we saw that it was a potential and that people could be organised on that to get more into the fight for the rights of migrants and migrant women in the UK. (Activist 13)

This observation highlights their strategic approach to intersectional activism. By recognizing the momentum in both women's and LGBTQ+ rights movements in Poland and the UK, these activists see the potential for broader mobilization. This strategic vision for leveraging the energy and organization within these movements to encompass the rights of migrants and migrant women reflects an intersectional approach to activism. It demonstrates an understanding that the struggles against gender oppression are inextricably linked with other forms of oppression, including those based on migration status and sexual orientation. The statement exemplifies intersectional feminism in practice. Intersectional feminism posits that various forms of social stratification, such as race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, do not exist in isolation but are interwoven and mutually constitutive. The engagement of these Polish activists in women's and LGBTQ+ rights movements, along with their focus on migrant issues, showcases their recognition of the complex ways in which different forms of oppression intersect and impact individuals, especially within transnational contexts.

Transnational feminist activism among Polish women in Britain is marked by a responsive approach to the evolving needs of their community also in the context of significant socio-political changes, such as Brexit. One of the research participants highlights the collaborative nature of their activism, engaging with a range of pro-migrant organizations to address the diverse needs of migrants in the wake of Brexit. This approach, as stated, *involves working with other pro-migrant organisations (...) organising events, talks, or consultations about what migrants need, what is happening e.g. around the changes caused by Brexit* (Activist 16), reflects an understanding of the interconnected challenges faced by different migrant communities and the importance of solidarity and collective action.

Another participant's focus (feminist activist and academic) on European issues, particularly their active participation in anti-Brexit marches, signifies

a broader engagement with political movements that transcend traditional feminist concerns:

The main issue for the last five or six years has been the European issue, so we are always at the marches, we support these pro-Europe, anti-Brexit marches. (Activist 6)

Their involvement in pro-European and anti-Brexit demonstrations underscores an intersectional approach to activism, where migrant and gender identities intersect with broader political dynamics. The intersectional nature of transnational feminist activism among Polish activists in the UK is further exemplified in their engagement with broader social and labour issues, extending beyond traditional gender concerns. This multifaceted approach is particularly evident in the activities of Polish feminist groups in academic settings, as well as in their solidarity with global labour movements.

A key aspect of this activism is the integration of educational endeavours with direct action. One activist, involved in the activities of the Polish students' organisation, describes their involvement:

I joined a feminist group at the University which held meetings but also participated in various protests e.g. in solidarity with striking cleaners, organized some book clubs. (Activist 7)

This statement underscores a commitment to intersectionality that transcends gender to include class and labour rights. By engaging in protests in solidarity with striking cleaners and organizing book clubs, these activists demonstrate an understanding that gender issues are inextricably linked with broader systemic inequalities. The book clubs likely serve as platforms for deepening knowledge on feminist and intersectional theories, enhancing the group's effectiveness in activism.

Furthermore, the actions of these Polish feminist activists in the UK reflect a global perspective on feminist issues. As another activist recounts:

We stand in solidarity in various actions (...) where there was this incident where women, laundresses working in a factory, caught fire and unfortunately died. This case raised some very serious issues about workers and women's rights and minors in general. (Activist 4)

This expression of solidarity with women workers from a distant country in South America, who suffered a tragic factory fire, signifies an acute awareness of the interconnectedness of women's rights with labour rights and safety. The mourning protest, described as: *in silence, also in black, we took candles and flowers and lined up along the street and stood in such silence for 10–15 minutes. Cars were slowing down, people were looking at what was happening* (Activist 4), was not only symbolic but also a powerful statement of global feminist solidarity. This action, which garnered public attention, demonstrates the potential of

such public demonstrations to raise awareness about global issues of workers' and women's rights.

The expanded focus of Polish feminist activists in the UK, as illustrated by their engagement with academic, labour, and global feminist issues, reflects the evolving nature of feminist movements worldwide. Their activism reveals an understanding that gender issues cannot be addressed in isolation but are intertwined with a range of social injustices. By supporting labour movements, engaging in educational discussions, and standing in solidarity with global feminist causes, these activists broaden the feminist agenda to encompass a more comprehensive array of social justice issues.

Another discourse surrounding the intersectionality of transnational feminist activism is international humanitarian efforts. This dimension of transnational feminist activism reflects a profound commitment to global solidarity and an understanding of the interconnected nature of various forms of oppression and crises. For instance, Polish feminist activists' solidarity with Ukraine transcends national affiliations, aligning with a global feminist perspective that acknowledges the impact of war and conflict on women and marginalized communities. This engagement exemplifies an intersectional approach in which transnational feminist activism intersects with geopolitical crises, recognizing that these events have gendered implications and affect vulnerable populations disproportionately. This approach acknowledges that the ramifications of wars and disasters are deeply gendered, affecting women and marginalized communities in specific and often more severe ways.

The intersectional nature of transnational feminist activism among Polish activists in the UK is also expressed in their involvement in promoting democratic values and political mobilisation, both in relation to their country of origin (such as pre-election mobilisation encouraging Poles to vote in elections, most recently in autumn 2023) and their host country (e.g. involvement in anti-Brexit initiatives, as mentioned above).

One activist reflects on the period leading up to the elections in Poland:

Before the elections it was all about the elections and what kind of Poland we want to see and what kind of Poland we want to be proud of. And the issues of women's rights, abortion, LGBT were raised a lot (...) We had events in English. (...) We focus on the Polish community, but we also want the voice of the Polish community and the Polish left to get through to the British. So we go out with the initiative to other organisations that are somehow close to us. (Activist 5)

This statement highlights the activists' dual focus on influencing the political landscape in Poland and engaging the broader community in the UK, including the British public. Their efforts to conduct events in English and collaborate with local organizations indicate a strategic approach to activism that transcends linguistic and cultural barriers. By amplifying issues such as women's

rights, abortion, and LGBT rights in the context of Polish elections, these activists are working towards fostering a transnational dialogue that not only addresses the concerns of the Polish diaspora but also resonates with broader, universal themes of human rights and democracy.

The collaboration with other European groups further underscores the transnational aspect of their pro-democratic activism. As mentioned by a feminist activist:

Lately we have been working most closely with the Dziewuchy Berlin and the Dziewuchy Switzerland. Even as part of the pre-election campaign now they did a great series of meetings with politicians which they called the "Pre-election Pill" which we added our logo to it and promoted these meetings with us in our media. (Activist 8)

This partnership with groups from Berlin and Switzerland signifies a pan-European feminist movement that is not confined by national borders. The "Pre-election Pill" campaign is a testament to their commitment to engaging in democratic processes, not only within the confines of Poland but also in the diaspora, thus fostering a sense of shared responsibility and collective action among Polish communities abroad. Furthermore, the efforts to engage the Polish diaspora in political processes, as elucidated in the statement below, reflect a deep commitment to maintaining connections with their homeland and influencing change.

We reach out to Polish people who live here (...) we talked to people about the elections why they left Poland whether they want to come back what they want to see in Poland. (Activist 5)

This aspect of their activism reveals an understanding of the diaspora's potential impact on political developments in Poland. By initiating conversations about the reasons for emigration and the desire to return, these activists are tapping into a complex web of motivations and experiences that shape the political perspectives of the Polish diaspora.

Challenges

The feminist activist's observation reflects a common issue in migrant activism: the tendency of specific national groups to operate within their cultural and linguistic silos, often limiting their engagement and collaboration with other migrant groups.

The truth is that such migrant organisations when it comes to specific national groups often don't come out too much to connect with others. They speak their language often, they have their contacts (...) they don't necessarily know groups from other countries that support them or can support them (...) I'm often the liaison to the UK and I know

a lot of people who are involved in UK politics and I'm the one who suggests who to get in touch with as far as the UK is concerned. Often people focus on one or the other, either they are Polish activists in the UK or they are British activists. There are not that many people who do both. (Activist 5)

This phenomenon can be understood through the lens of transnationalism and social network theory. As scholars like Alejandro Portes in *The Economic Sociology of Immigration* (1995) have noted, migrants often create transnational spaces that are deeply rooted in their culture and language. While these spaces provide a sense of community and belonging, they can also create barriers to broader engagement with other groups. The activist's role as a connector between Polish activists and British political circles underscores the importance of bridging these cultural and linguistic divides to foster wider cooperation and solidarity. The quote further highlights a dichotomy often observed in migrant activism: the distinction between engaging in activism related to one's country of origin and engaging in the political landscape of the host country. This bifurcation, as pointed out by the activist, leads to a situation where individuals often focus either on issues pertinent to their national identity or on those relevant to their life in the diaspora, with few navigating both spheres effectively. This observation aligns with the arguments made by Nina Glick Schiller and others in *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration* (1992), where they discuss the dual focus of transnational migrants on their country of origin and their country of residence.

In the context of feminist activism, this challenge is further compounded by the need to address gender-specific issues that may vary significantly across different cultural and national backgrounds. The ability to navigate these complexities is crucial for the success of transnational feminist movements, as noted by authors like Inderpal Grewal in *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* (2005), who discuss the challenges and opportunities presented by globalization and transnationalism in feminist activism. This issue is crucial in the context of international meetings and collaborations, where the unique experiences and problems of Polish activists are often not fully comprehended or acknowledged by others. One research participant poignantly captures this sense of alienation and misunderstanding:

(...) we have the opportunity and the space to talk about our pain and our problems, and at the same time I feel that the other side totally doesn't understand it. And it is even like, why talk about it, it's not important, and they take a pen and leave. (Activist 7)

This experience suggests that the challenges extend beyond the realm of language. The participant's feeling that their concerns are not deemed significant by others points to a deeper issue of cultural and contextual disconnect. This lack of understanding and interest might stem from a gap in awareness or empathy

towards the specific contexts and stages of struggles faced by Polish women. The divergent socio-political histories and contemporary realities of different countries can lead to varied feminist agendas and priorities. For Polish women activists, their experiences are shaped by their unique historical, cultural, and political backgrounds, which may not always resonate with or be understood by activists from other countries with different feminist trajectories.

The experience shared by the participant reflects a broader issue in transnational feminist activism – the challenge of creating a truly inclusive and empathetic movement that acknowledges and respects the diversity of experiences and struggles. This challenge is not just about overcoming language barriers but also about bridging the gaps in understanding and interest. It requires a conscious effort to foster a deeper awareness and appreciation of the varied contexts from which different feminist groups emerge.

The experiences shared by the activists highlight the nuances of creating solidarity within and across different migrant groups and the impact of linguistic factors on their activism. One research participant points out the cultural affinities among Eastern and Central Eastern Europeans, stating:

I think there's certainly a lot of truth in the fact that Eastern Europeans or Central Eastern Europeans have more in common culturally often, somehow it's easier to work together. (Activist 16)

This cultural proximity can indeed facilitate collaboration among these groups. However, the participant also notes a disconnect with British groups:

I think our groups, for example Polish groups, may seem inaccessible to British people because some events or activities happen in Polish. (Activist 16)

The use of Polish in events and activities, while fostering a sense of community among Polish migrants, may inadvertently create barriers to wider engagement, limiting the visibility and accessibility of their activism to non-Polish speakers. This linguistic barrier is further emphasized by another participant, feminist activist, a member of an informal group working against anti-democratic changes in Poland, who reflects on the practical challenges of organizing events in Polish:

We assumed that we would conduct the workshops in Polish, because not all of them speak English (...) And what, are we going to invite Czech and Slovak women to these meetings of ours in Polish? I don't think so... (Activist 9)

This statement highlights the practicalities dictating the choice of language and the resulting limitations in terms of inclusivity and outreach. The varying English proficiency levels within the group, from academics to cleaners, add to the complexity of ensuring effective communication and inclusivity in their activities.

In conclusion, the activist's reflections provide valuable insights into the challenges of transnational cooperation among migrant organizations, including those with a feminist agenda. They underscore the need for more intersectional and inclusive approaches that transcend linguistic and cultural barriers.

Conclusion

The exploration of the transnational feminist activism of Polish migrants in the UK reveals a complex mosaic of interactions and collaborations that transcend national confines, illustrating the fluidity and adaptability of feminist movements in a globalized world. This activism is not just a response to the immediate socio-political circumstances in Poland but also a proactive engagement with the broader feminist agenda, addressing issues that resonate globally.

At the core of these engagements is a deep-rooted sense of solidarity, a driving force that fuels the transnational connections and collaborations among these activists. This solidarity is not merely a theoretical construct; it manifests in concrete actions and shared objectives, reflecting a collective determination to address gender inequality and advocate for reproductive rights. The shared experiences of marginalization, discrimination, and struggle serve as a unifying thread, binding these activists together in their pursuit of a more equitable world.

The strategic vision of Polish feminists in the UK is another critical aspect of their activism. Recognizing the limitations of isolated efforts, these activists have embraced a transnational approach, extending their reach and impact beyond geographical borders. This strategy involves not only supporting feminist movements in Poland but also aligning with and contributing to global feminist discourses. By doing so, they underscore the universality of feminist struggles, emphasizing that the fight for gender equality is not confined to any single nation or culture but is a global imperative.

Furthermore, the activism of Polish feminists in the UK is characterized by its responsiveness to the evolving socio-political landscape in their homeland. They are acutely aware of the implications of political changes in Poland, especially concerning women's rights and freedoms. This awareness drives their activism, prompting them to mobilize in solidarity with their counterparts in Poland, be it through protests, advocacy campaigns, or policy interventions. Their actions are often a direct response to specific events or policy decisions in Poland, reflecting a commitment to influencing and shaping the socio-political narrative in their country of origin.

The research presented here highlights the significant impact of transnational collaboration in the realm of feminist activism, especially as exemplified

by the activities of Polish feminists in the UK. These activists have strategically aligned with a multitude of international groups, creating a network that spans across continents and cultures. This extensive network is not just a testament to their organizational skills but also to their deep understanding of the global nature of feminist issues. Central to this transnational collaboration is the sharing and adaptation of successful strategies from various global contexts. Polish feminist activists in the UK have shown a remarkable ability to assimilate diverse tactics and approaches, ranging from grassroots mobilization to digital advocacy. This adaptability has allowed them to address issues more effectively, tailoring their actions to fit the unique challenges faced by women in different socio-political environments. By integrating global perspectives and methodologies, these activists have enriched their own practices, making their movement more robust and dynamic.

This approach has significantly amplified the voice of Polish feminists in the UK, allowing them to reach a broader audience and gain greater visibility on the international stage. Through their involvement in global networks, they have been able to highlight issues of importance to their community, bringing attention to the specific challenges faced by Polish women both in their homeland and in the diaspora. Their active participation in international forums and collaborations has positioned them as key contributors to the global feminist discourse, enabling them to shape and influence the narrative around gender equality and women's rights.

Moreover, the focus on abortion rights as a central theme of their activism exemplifies the universal nature of this struggle. The fight for reproductive rights, a cornerstone of feminist activism, transcends national boundaries and cultural contexts. Their advocacy and campaigning efforts have not only supported the movement in Poland but have also resonated with broader international efforts to protect and advance reproductive rights.

The investigation into the transnational feminist activism of Polish migrants in the UK illuminates the multi-layered and intersectional character of their advocacy. These activists are not merely representatives of a single identity; they embody a confluence of identities – as women, as migrants, and as active proponents of social change. Their activism, therefore, is not a singular narrative focused solely on gender, but a multifaceted engagement that intersects with broader societal issues such as migration, labour rights, and the socio-political landscape of both their homeland and host country.

Polish feminist activists in the UK actively engage with pro-migrant organizations, reflecting a nuanced understanding of the intersectionality of their struggle. Their participation in these groups highlights their recognition of the interconnectedness of gender and migration issues. For instance, their involvement in campaigns for better labour conditions showcases an acknowledgment of the specific vulnerabilities migrant women face in the workforce – vulnerabilities

compounded by both gender and migrant status. This engagement illustrates their commitment to addressing the various layers of inequality and discrimination that impact migrant women's lives.

Additionally, their participation in broader political movements, such as anti-Brexit demonstrations, underscores an acute awareness of the wider socio-political factors affecting migrant communities. Such activism reflects a recognition that political decisions, like Brexit, have profound implications on migrants' rights, social inclusion, and access to resources – issues that disproportionately affect women.

However, this study also underscores the challenges inherent in transnational feminist activism. One significant challenge is the tendency of migrant organizations to operate within cultural and linguistic confines, often limiting their capacity to engage with a more diverse array of feminist groups. This insularity can lead to a fragmented approach to activism, where groups work in parallel but not in concert, potentially diluting the impact of their collective efforts.

Moreover, the difficulty in bridging gaps in understanding and interest across different feminist groups is another notable challenge. This issue is particularly pertinent in a transnational context, where varying cultural backgrounds, socio-political experiences, and feminist traditions can lead to divergent priorities and approaches. The experiences of Polish feminist activists in the UK suggest that while there is a strong sense of solidarity based on shared gendered experiences, there is a need for a more profound effort to embrace the full spectrum of diversity within the feminist movement. This requires actively seeking to understand and integrate different perspectives, acknowledging the unique struggles of various groups, and creating a more inclusive and representative feminist discourse.

The findings of this research call for a more inclusive and empathetic approach in global feminist movements. Such an approach would not only foster greater solidarity but also enhance the effectiveness of the movement by ensuring that it addresses the diverse needs and experiences of all women. It involves creating spaces for dialogue and collaboration that transcend cultural and linguistic barriers, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the varied contexts from which different feminist groups emerge.

In conclusion, the transnational feminist activism of Polish migrants in the UK exemplifies the complex interplay of gender, migration, and broader socio-political factors in shaping feminist advocacy. While their activism is marked by a strong sense of solidarity and a multifaceted approach to addressing inequality, the challenges they face highlight the need for a more integrated and empathetic feminist movement. This would ensure that the movement not only resonates with a broader constituency but also effectively addresses the multifarious forms of oppression that impact women's lives in a globalized world.

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Early View