

The London School of Economics and Political Science

*Politics of Sexuality in Neoliberal(ized) Times and  
Spaces: LGBT Movements and Reparative Therapy in  
Contemporary Poland*

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## Abstract

Research on the politics of sexuality and the LGBT movement in contemporary Poland tends to overlook the larger socio-economic changes that affect them. Omitting these processes from studies of sexuality, given the profound transformations occurring in Poland over the last two to three decades, produces incomplete accounts. This study builds on the existing knowledge of the politics of sexuality in contemporary Poland and extends it by addressing the question of whether and how processes of neoliberalization matter and how differences of class, gender, and location position subjects differently within the landscape of politics of sexuality. Through a mixed qualitative approach, combining content and discourse analysis with semi-structured in-depth interviews, this project addresses existing empirical and theoretical research gaps. Empirically, it engages with the LGBT movement in general, focusing on two largely unstudied phenomena: Christian LGBT organizing – as exemplified by *Wiara i Tęcza* (WiT, Faith and Rainbow) – and religiously motivated sexual reorientation therapy, also known as Reparative Therapy (RT). Theoretically, this study explores how processes of neoliberalization collude with existing patriarchal regimes shaping individual subjectivities, but also affecting the kind of politics that are possible both locally and globally. Drawing on the literature on sexuality and capitalism I argue that WiT's project is best understood through what I term *godly homonormativity*. My analysis of RT is informed by the literature on psychotherapeutics and how these align with neoliberal ideas of personhood but moving beyond the individual level, I argue that RT should be understood as *commodification of homophobia* and it must be analyzed in relation to the neoliberal framework that enables it. Finally, I demonstrate that LGBT organizing and RT are classed, localized and gendered and argue that these complex intersections can only be understood by linking them back to the material conditions in which they are produced.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 The research question and motivation behind the study**

Poland's transition from state socialism towards market democracy over the past three decades has been marked, among other developments, by an intensification of debates around sexual politics. The Polish LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual) movement has largely benefitted from the regime change; nevertheless, the new socio-economic circumstances have also brought about new challenges that impacted upon its growth, and character, in not always positive ways. At the same time, politics of sexuality in general and the LGBT movement more specifically have been studied extensively in Poland in the last fifteen years (see for example Binnie & Klesse, 2013a, 2013b; Graff, 2006; Holz hacker, 2013; Keinz, 2011; Kliszczynski, 2001; Kochanowski, 2007-2008; Majka, 2008/2009; O'Dwyer, 2012). However, research on these subjects tends to overlook the material reality in which they have developed and operate, as well as the larger socio-economic processes that affect them, focusing instead predominantly on political and/or cultural lines of inquiry – with a notable exception of Jon Binnie's recent work (2014). Thus, the impact the processes of neoliberalization and neoliberal ideology have on the ways in which Polish politics of sexuality, and the LGBT movement have developed constitutes a stark research and knowledge gap. Moreover, despite a large body of literature addressing questions of sexuality, there is a striking lack of analyses that *simultaneously* pay attention to questions of gender, class, and location with the exception of the recent report on lesbians living in small town and rural locations (Fundacja Przestrzeń Kobiet, 2015). Yet, considering the fact that the Polish LGBT movement's origins and growth are inextricably linked to the move to market democracy with a strong neoliberal character, Poland constitutes a very suitable case study for examining the connections between neoliberalization – with its classed, gendered, *and* localized dimensions – and



politics of sexuality. Concurrently, omitting these lines of inquiry from studies of sexuality, given the profound transformations occurring in Poland over the last two to three decades, produces accounts that are at best incomplete. It is these research gaps this project is aiming to address and in this study I build on the existing knowledge of the politics of sexuality in Poland and extend it by responding to the following broad research problem, and two specific research questions:

- How does neoliberalization impact upon the politics of sexuality in contemporary Poland?
  - In what ways are individual subjectivities and collective endeavours of LGBT people shaped by individualization, commodification and the expansion of the market into ever more spheres of life?
  - How do differences of class, gender, and location, position subjects differently within the landscape of politics of sexuality?

Whilst politics of sexuality can be tackled from many different angles – for example from the perspective of state policies and laws, or in relation to transnational flows of ideas – my focus here is on the kind of politics of sexuality that can be best described as grassroots and I concentrate on three interlinked empirical sites that are also demarcated by their bottom up character. Thus, on an empirical level, I engage with the Polish mainstream LGBT movement, as well as focusing on two largely understudied phenomena: Christian LGBT organizing – as exemplified by *Wiara i Tęcza* (WiT, Faith and Rainbow) – and groups devoted to sexual reorientation therapy, also known as Reparative Therapy (RT).

Arguably, the Polish LGBT movement is only as old as Polish democracy post 1989, even if some informal lesbian and gay (LG) organizing also took place before. It entered the academic field of vision properly around the time of Poland's accession to the European Union (EU) in the 2000s, and at the time when tensions around the questions of LGBT equality, or rather the lack thereof, ran high. With nearly three decades of LGBT organizing, the current situation of the Polish LGBT movement is characterized by on the one

hand a level of establishment on the part of certain actors, in particular the Warsaw based *Kampania Przeciw Homofobii* (Campaign Against Homophobia) and on the other hand a continuous struggle for resources, and effectively survival, by many other organizations. The situation is only made worse by the LGBT-hostile political climate, most recently exacerbated by the electoral win of the right-wing *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (Law and Justice, PiS).

WiT is an informal group that was established in 2010 with the aim of offering support to religious LGBT people, as well as to lobby for a greater acceptance of LGBT people within the Roman Catholic Church, and society at large. Currently, WiT is the largest LGBT organization in Poland, with ten local groups operating across the country (Wiara i Tęcza, 2017). RT in the form that I am concerned with in this study arrived in Poland in the 2000s. RT is based on the premise that people are innately heterosexual and that homosexuality is a developmental disorder that can, and should, be treated (Drescher, 2002). This study is based on my examination of three Polish organizations – *Odwaga* (Courage), *Pomoc 2002* (Help 2002), and *Pascha* (Passover) – offering reparative therapy to homosexual men in contemporary Poland. Whilst WiT and the above-mentioned RT groups represent radically different views on LGBT sexualities, where they collude is in their commitment to religion. By situating these two separate phenomena, within (in the case of WiT) and without (in the case of RT) the larger LGBT movement I explore how the landscape of politics of sexuality is shaped and remade by these relatively new actors.

Moreover, and arguably more centrally to the aims of this study, I use these empirical sites to probe the ways in which Polish bottom up politics of sexuality are influenced and at times circumscribed by processes of neoliberalization and how the effects of individualization, commodification, and expansion of the market into ever more spheres of life can be felt structurally, as well as on the level of individual subjectivities. By mapping out how these aspects of neoliberalization affect the sites I examine, on a meta level, what this study offers is a critique of neoliberalism and the sexual politics it engenders, a critique premised on the conviction that things should always be considered in their historical and material contexts. At the same time, by paying attention to differences of gender, location, and class I also aim to offer a more nuanced reading of the empirical sites I investigate. Such reading has the potential to

widen our understanding of the myriad of ways of being LGBT in Poland today, as well as to counterbalance the metrocentric and often gender and class-blind accounts that abound of the Polish LGBT movement and bottom up politics of sexuality in general.

Whilst in Chapter 2 I give a detailed account of the various strands of knowledge that this study builds on, what I offer below is an outline of the theoretical and analytical frameworks deployed. In the subsequent part of this chapter I introduce the context of my study by offering some opening thoughts on the Polish politics of sexuality. This is followed by a brief outline of the Catholic Church's position on homosexuality, which is relevant to my discussion of RT, WiT as well as the LGBT movement more generally. I then move on to discussing the emergence of RT in the United States (US) and its arrival in Poland. The succeeding section is an introduction to neoliberalization and class in the Polish context. The following and final part of this chapter provides a summary of the contributions this study is aiming to make on both an empirical and a theoretical level, while also offering an outline of the structure of the thesis, signaling the aims and content of the chapters that follow.

## **1.2 Introducing the theoretical framework and analytical approach**

In this study, I map out the links between grassroots politics of sexuality and the material conditions in which they operate, aiming to further our understanding of the complex ways in which individual narratives and lives are linked to larger processes, and structures. What drives this project theoretically is my interest in neoliberalism and processes of neoliberalization and their effects on politics of sexuality more specifically. Holding these two together analytically is in turn informed by materialist feminist tradition – which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 2 – and I work from the premise that politics of sexuality and material conditions should be studied relationally. Thus, this study is a consideration of *how* rather than *if* material conditions matter for politics of sexuality. Indeed, considering the global spread of neoliberalism as not only a theory of political economy, but also as ideology, a point that I revisit in Chapter 2, it is unlikely that any area of social life remains unaffected by it. Since my concern here is with the material conditions that impress on the landscape of politics of

sexuality as much as with the subjective narratives that populate it, the concept of class emerged as central to my analysis. At the same time it is important to note here that my interest in issues of neoliberalization and class, and sets of debates relevant to these, grew out from my engagement with the data collected for this study, rather than informing it from the start, a process that I account for in more detail in Chapter 4.

Class remains a useful category for analyzing social stratification, even if class analysis itself has undergone several revamps since it first emerged, and traditional ways of thinking about class have been challenged by the so called ‘cultural turn’ in the social sciences (Devine & Savage, 2004). Throughout much of the twentieth century class analysis has been central to the discipline of sociology. During the same time class and class position have been largely theorised as derived from a person’s occupation, and the work of John Goldthorpe and his team on the *Affluent Worker* series (1968, 1969) and his quantitative research (1980) into class structure and social mobility in the UK was particularly influential. However, this work – alongside other research on class of the time – has been critiqued extensively for focusing on grouping people into categories based solely on their employment, and thus for being reductionist and inattentive to other axes of difference such as gender, race and ethnicity (Crompton, 2008). Moreover, and not unrelatedly, a shift in the discourse of social justice from claims for redistribution to claims for recognition, as famously framed by Nancy Fraser (1995, 1999), and the increasing predominance of the latter (Fraser, 1999) further eroded importance of class analysis. These challenges have on the one hand brought about a debate around the overall usefulness of class as a concept for analyzing modern society, with some dismissing it as outdated and thus irrelevant (Beck, 1992, 2000). On the other hand, new ways of thinking through class emerged; here the work of Pierre Bourdieu (2010; first published in 1979) in particular provided a new set of analytical tools that enabled scholars to approach class from a different angle. Inspired by Bourdieu, class has been thought about in mainstream and feminist work, with some excellent work done in the UK in particular on the ways in which class is embodied and lived. Noteworthy examples include work of scholars such as Bev Skeggs (1997, 2004) on working-class women’s negotiations of their classed positionalities, Yvette

Taylor's work on working class lesbians (2004, 2007, 2008), Diane Reay's work that expands on Bourdieu's concept of capitals (1997, 2004) as well as examining working class students' experiences of higher education (Reay, Crozier, & Clayton, 2009) and Imogen Tyler's (2013, 2015) and Lisa McKenzie's (2015) work on class and struggles over legitimation, meanings and representation. What these works have in common is their insistence on the relevance of class as an analytical category, despite a shift in positioning of class within the UK and a 'possible attempt to remove it from the British consciousness' (McKenzie, 2015, p. 203). At the same time, in line with Bourdieu, the way class has been conceptualized in the work mentioned above focuses on cultural practices, representations, values and meanings, and whilst culture is an important site where class struggles take place and class inequalities are reproduced and at times challenged, the basis of such inequalities does not lie in culture, but in the system of production that gives rise to it, maintains, and feeds off it. Yet, as evidenced by the examples listed here, and other academic efforts including proposals of a whole new class schema (Mike Savage et al., 2013), class analysis that puts culture at its centre is very prominent in the UK. The importance of Bourdieu's approach to class analysis is thus unquestionable, however, there have also been voices that challenge its primacy and advocate for continuous variety of approaches to grasping the cultural as well as economic dimensions of class (Crompton & Scott, 2004).

The concept of social class is crucial to understanding how inequality is structured and experienced, and class can, and should be defined in terms of the economic relationship between people within any given mode of production. Consequently, in this study I take the view of class very much in line with the historical materialist tradition, informed by the work of Marx and Engels, and as defined by the relationship of exploitation, inherent to capitalism, between those that own means of production and accumulate profit by accruing surplus value of those who labor for wages. Whilst on the most basic level this produces two classes of bourgeois owners and workers, in economically and technologically advanced societies, the existence of a professional managerial class and a reserve army of laborers complicate this initial distinction, and so does the difference between primary sector workers and secondary sector workers, with

the former ones being in a position of greater security and the latter's position characterized by insecurity, low wages, and lack of many benefits (Hennessy, 2000, p. 13); with the recent explosion of flexible forms of employment such as zero hour contracts in the UK, or their Polish equivalent, *umowy śmieciowe* (literally: rubbish contracts), being examples of such stratification. Thus, the relative advantage of the primary sector workers distinguishes them from others who also sell their labor, albeit on much worse terms, and creates a basis for the middle class (ibid.). I return to the question of class and how class analysis has been neglected in Poland (albeit in different ways than in the UK) below and I revisit the question of class as culture in Chapter 2.

Whilst I discuss neoliberalism in detail in Chapter 2, what is important to signal here is that far from being a one dimensional concept, neoliberalism has been theorised as a policy framework, as an ideology, as well as through the lens of governmentality, so relating to the way in which it shapes subjectivities of people who live under its conditions (Larner, 2000; p.12). In this study I take an integrative approach to these existing ways of thinking through neoliberalism and its related processes. What this arguably unorthodox approach enables me to do is to hold these different aspects of neoliberalism together for analysis and draw from each of the bodies of knowledges that address them to make sense of the phenomena and processes under investigation, instead of artificially separating them for the sake of theoretical purity.

Moreover, and as will become clear in the following chapters, this study is informed by, and mediated through, many strands of feminist scholarship on the issues it addresses, as well as feminist methodologies, and epistemology, and builds on their tradition of paying attention to matters of gender relations and questions of unequal distribution of resources (economic, political and otherwise) between men and women. I understand gender as one of the main forms of social difference that denotes the socially constructed distinction between women and men. At the same time, in my view, gender can never exist outside of class relations and in this study I emphasize the mutual shaping of class and gender, and their interconnectedness at all levels of social relations. It is also in this moment that materialist feminism becomes an invaluable point of reference, and the main underlying political and analytical current of this study. Materialist feminist analyses, regardless of their different strands and emphases,

to which I return to in Chapter 2, insist on analyzing class and gender, as well as other axes of difference together. In addition, and not unrelatedly, whilst I view sexuality as analytically distinct from gender, and denoting ‘what is socially defined as of erotic significance’ (Jackson & Scott, 2007, p. 97), I consider it to be empirically always related to gender in line with Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott’s conceptualization of it (Jackson & Scott, 2002, 2007). More importantly, however, I regard both sexuality and gender to be part of what Rosemary Hennessy refers to as culture-ideology, which functions to ‘displace, condense, compensate, mask and contest the basic inequality of capitalism’ (Hennessy, 2000, p. 11). It is on that basis that the feminist materialist insistence of scholars such as Hennessy (2000, 2014) on studying sexualities in relation to capitalism becomes a logical extension of the feminist materialist project and a central line of inquiry in my study. Consequently, in this project I explore how processes of neoliberalization collude with existing patriarchal gender regimes shaping individual subjectivities in class and location specific ways, but also affecting the kind of politics of sexuality that are possible both locally and globally.

Moreover and more specifically in relation to the empirical sites this study focuses on, drawing on the literature on sexuality and capitalism, and the body of knowledge that theorizes the relationship between capitalism and sexual identities, and LGBT politics in neoliberalism in particular, I investigate WiT’s project in relation to theories of homonormativity. Homonormativity has been theorised as the dominant sexual politics of neoliberalism (Duggan, 2003), a politics that does not threaten the dominant heteronormative institutions and norms, ‘but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption’ (Duggan, 2003, p. 179). Homonormativity becomes a useful theoretical tool to start thinking through WiT’s project, and my investigation thereof demonstrates how locally specific forms of homonormativity become possible in collusion with existing regimes of gender relations and, importantly, regardless of state support.

Informed by the literature on individualization and the critique thereof, my analysis of RT draws specifically on the body of literature that discusses how psychotherapeutics, with their focus on self-adjustment and self-improvement, align with neoliberal ideas of personhood; here the work of

Nicholas Rose (1999a) and Eva Illouz (2007) is of particular relevance. At the same time, moving beyond the individual level, I argue that RT needs to also be understood in relation to the market and as a form of *commodification of homophobia*, which in turn makes it crucial that it is analyzed in relation to the neoliberal contexts that enable it both ideologically and materially.

In my investigation of the empirical sites under scrutiny here, I examine the ways in which LGBT organizing, both mainstream and Christian, and RT are classed, localized, and gendered. I also argue that these complex connections can only be understood by linking them back to the material conditions in which they are produced, reproduced, and contested. To begin unpacking these complex connections, in what follows, I first situate the three interlinked empirical sites of my inquiry contextually.

### **1.3 Introducing the context**

#### **1.3.1. Politics of sexuality in postsocialist Poland**

The politics of sexuality in Poland post 1989 has been a contested site and it has been pointed out that the first ‘cultural battle’ of the new democracy ensued around the restrictive anti-abortion law introduced in January 1993 (Keinz, 2011).<sup>1</sup> Arguably, it is however the question of LGBT equality – or, more precisely, the lack thereof – and the opposition to it that became an important arena for a variety of confrontations that took place in the decades after the fall of state socialism (Graff, 2006, 2010). Whilst the socialist regime did not allow for legal LGBT organizing – a point I return to in Chapter 3 where I discuss the origins and development of the Polish LGBT movement in detail – the shift to market democracy opened up a new world of possibilities for the Polish civic society LGBT organizing included, even if the reality in which the latter came to operate was marked by high levels of homo-, bi- and trans-phobia.

On the one hand, discrimination against sexual minorities has now been well documented in the Polish context (Andersen & Fetner, 2008; Czarnecki, 2007; Kitlinski & Leszkowicz, 2005; Selinger, 2008; Sypniewski & Warkocki,

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<sup>1</sup> Poland’s abortion laws have traditionally been liberal, with abortion legalized first in 1932, giving women the right to abortion for both legal and medical reasons. In 1956 a new legal provision made it possible for women to seek abortion for socio-economic reasons, based on their ‘difficult living conditions’ (Zielinska, 2000; p. 25).



2004; Törnquist-Plewa & Malmgren, 2007). On the other hand, it has been pointed out that the tension, as well as the debates surrounding the issue intensified significantly around the European Union (EU) accession in 2004 (Graff, 2006; Kulpa & Mizielińska, 2011), when Poland faced pressures to introduce antidiscrimination legislation to protect its LGBT citizens (Kochenov, 2007; O'Dwyer, 2010). The tensions were not, however, resolved through accession, and they have continued to influence Poland's relationship with the EU, a fact illustrated through the European Parliament's resolutions in 2006 and 2007 that condemned homophobia in Poland based on openly homophobic statements of Polish right-wing politicians (Graff, 2006). Additionally, it could be argued that it was through the banning by the then president of Warsaw,<sup>2</sup> Lech Kaczyński in 2004 and 2005 – as well as the reaction to – some of the first LGBT pride parades that hostility towards LGBT people and in particular homophobia in Poland became the focus of Western media attention and of academic scrutiny (see for instance Gruszczyńska, 2007, 2009a, 2009b; Sypniewski & Warkocki, 2004; Törnquist-Plewa & Malmgren, 2007; Van den Bogaert, 2007).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, and not unrelatedly, resistance to LGBT equality became a tool in the repertoire of Polish right-wing politics which in turn became characterized by attachment to 'traditional' Polish values, centered around Catholicism and the heterosexual, patriarchal family; as continuously exemplified in the politics of *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (PiS)<sup>4</sup> (Law and Justice) (Keinz, 2011; Koczanowicz, 2008; SHIBATA, 2009; Shields, 2012). At the same time, with the EU accession, the newly emerged Polish LGBT organizations have increasingly been able to benefit from transnational links (with mainly Western organizations) and resources to highlight

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<sup>2</sup> In Poland, all urban communes (*gminy*) with more than 100,000 inhabitants are managed by presidents, whilst mayors manage urban communes with populations smaller than that.

<sup>3</sup> The marches of 2004 and 2005 took place under the more timid designation of *Marsze Równości* (Equality Marches). A decade later, the parades have become a yearly feature and the Warsaw one this year, 2017, took place relatively peacefully, with some counter-demonstrations from ultra nationalistic and homophobic *Obóz Radykalno Narodowy* (ONR, Radical National Camp); it attracted a record number of almost 50,000 people (Borys, 2017). Interestingly, its name has 'evolved' into a hybrid between a pride parade and equality march, and the event is now called *Parada Równości* (Equality Parade).

<sup>4</sup> PiS was founded in 2001 around the brothers, Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński; its members came from various right-wing and centre-right political groupings. PiS was in power in the years 2005-2007, it came to power following the 2005 parliamentary elections in which it won 26.99% of votes. In the same year, the late Lech Kaczyński was elected president. In 2015 PiS returned to power winning 38% of the votes in the parliamentary elections.

discrimination and formulate demands vis-à-vis the Polish state (Ayoub, 2013; Binnie & Klesse, 2011; Holzacker, 2013).

Whilst the heightened attention to LGBT issues in Poland characterized much of the 2000s, the first half of 2010s came to be seen as a period of relative stability. There are several factors that can be said to have contributed to this improvement and the fact that the conservative and outright homophobic PiS lost the parliamentary elections in 2007 was certainly one of them (Józko, 2009; Kulpa & Mizielińska, 2011). At the same time, the winning party, *Platforma Obywatelska* (PO) (Civic Platform) was far from progressive on the matters of sexuality or LGBT equality. Rather, many considered it simply to be ‘the lesser evil’ (Kulpa, 2012) in comparison to the PiS administration. Far from accommodating any of the demands made by the Polish LGBT movement over the years, PO was nevertheless strongly pro-EU and the face of homophobia it represented was arguably more subtle (Struzik, 2012). The situation shifted again in 2015 when PiS returned to power winning a majority of seats in the *Sejm*; the 2015 elections also resulted in an effective disappearance of the left from the Polish parliament.<sup>5</sup> One of the consequences of the political situation in Poland in the most recent decade, dominated by PO and then PiS, is that real change in terms of legislation extending rights to LGBT persons or protecting them from discrimination has been slow to materialize and in particular the recent change back to the more conservative PiS has put any legal changes on hold for the foreseeable future. It is in that context that the role of LGBT organizations has been crucial, as the lack of state support and legal changes effectively place the burden of protecting the LGBT community from discrimination and monitoring its situation disproportionately on the third sector.

Thus, as sketched out above, the recent decades have been a stormy time in the Polish politics of sexuality, yet a time when surprisingly little has

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<sup>5</sup> The political left has been largely unsuccessful in the last three elections, despite its success in 2001 when the electoral alliance of SLD (The Alliance of the Democratic Left) and UP (Labour United) won 47% of all votes (PO came second with 14%). In the 2011 elections SLD gathered only 8% of votes. RP being the only alternative won 10% in 2011, but their support has been dwindling ever since (Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011). In the 2015 elections the left-wing coalition Zjednoczona Lewica (ZL)(United Left) failed to make it into parliament with 7,55% of the total vote (Poland has an 8% electoral threshold for coalitions); ZL was weakened by the emergence of a new, leftist party Razem (Together), which got 3,62% the votes, effectively splitting the left vote.

changed in terms of the legal protection of and provisioning for LGBT people. At the same time the Polish LGBT movement has been working towards greater visibility and social acceptance of LGBT people and as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 3, moderate progress has been made in these areas. What is unquestionable is that the time after the fall of state socialism has been marked by both a growth of LGBT organizing, as well as by increased political attention to issues of LGBT equality, even if the latter has often been manifested in a form of contestation rather than embracement of LGBT rights. It is during that turbulent period that the three Polish RT groups under scrutiny here were established – *Odwaga, Pascha, and Pomoc 2002*. Before moving on to introducing the phenomenon of RT, I will however discuss the role of the Catholic Church (CC) in Polish politics of sexuality, as the Church has been at the forefront of opposition to LGBT equality.

### **1.3.2. Catholic Church's position on homosexuality**

The Roman Catholic Church in Poland, and elsewhere, has generally taken an ultraconservative stance on issues such as abortion, contraception, same-sex unions and wider LGBT rights and its spokespersons continue to 'advise' on the dangers these pose to the family, nation, civilization, and life itself. Moreover, the position of the Church on homosexuality has remained largely unchanged since 1975,<sup>6</sup> where it was discussed in a document issued by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith entitled *Persona Humana* which stresses the disordered character of homosexuality and homosexual acts:

Homosexual relations (...) are condemned as a serious depravity (...) This judgment of Scripture does not of course permit us to conclude that all those who *suffer* from this *anomaly* are personally responsible for it, but it does attest to the fact that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered and can in no case be approved of (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1975).

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<sup>6</sup> The appointment of Jorge Mario Bergoglio as a Pope Francis in March 2013 has sparked new hopes amongst LGBTQ rights organizations, as the new pontiff appears less of a hardliner on the matters of homosexuality. Yet, more than four years into his papacy no official documentation has been issued that would suggest a change in the Catholic Church's understanding and attitude towards homosexuality. The results of the recent synod (held in October 2014) that reviewed the issue have in fact been considered a setback for Pope Francis' softer approach and no real change followed from the discussion that revealed a fracture between the pontiff and the traditionalists (BBC, 2014).

This line of thought is further developed in the *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* dated October 1986, which reads:

Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder (Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, 1986).

Thus, the Catholic Church remains a bastion of homophobia, despite the moderate efforts of its current head, which can at best be described as a one step forward two step backwards affair (see footnote 6). In the more recent document prepared by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education *Educational Guidance on Human Love* from 2000, homosexuality is discussed alongside masturbation and drug abuse in section IV entitled '*Some Particular Problems*'. Once again the term 'disorder' is used to describe it (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 2002). Additionally, in response to developments in legal recognition for same sex unions worldwide, the Vatican issued a document entitled *Family, Marriage and De Facto Unions* that urges governments to protect the institution of heterosexual marriage by not putting same sex unions on par with it (Pontifical Council for the Family, 2003).

Over the last decades, the Catholic Church in Poland has become particularly invested in a hard-line anti-LGBT stance, even if more moderate voices of church officials can also be heard at times. The Church has been repeatedly listed as a major source of homo, bi- and transphobia (Kościańska, 2012; *Sytuacja społeczna osób LGBT. Raport za lata 2010 i 2011*, 2012) and its continuous involvement in matters of gender and sexual politics does not signal that this is about to change any time soon (Graff, 2014; Zawadzka, 2010). However, whilst the Catholic Church in Poland remains hugely influential politically, economically and culturally, it is also important to point out that its, sometimes taken for granted, moral monopoly is waning and attitude surveys demonstrate that its teachings are often disregarded by its congregants (in particular on the matters of contraception, pre-marital sex and cohabitation, and divorce) (CBOS, 2013a). Thus, even though the Church's opinion on matters such as homosexuality cannot be considered irrelevant, its significance must not

be overestimated. What is of importance, however, is that the Catholic Church's official interpretation of homosexuality as a disorder has, to an extent, opened up a niche for a variety of Catholic actors to offer a faith-based treatment of homosexuality. At the same time, the Church's often explicitly homophobic involvements in the debates around LGBT issues have positioned it in an openly antagonistic relationship to the Polish LGBT movement and I return to the specific involvements of the Church in politics of sexuality in Poland in Chapter 3, as well as in my discussion of WiT's project in Chapter 5.

### **1.3.3. Reparative Therapy home and away**

Currently, no scholarly analysis exists of RT in Poland, except for Dorota Hall's examination of its portrayal in the media (Hall, 2017), which as insightful as it is, does not go beyond the representation of the practice in the public sphere. The fact that RT groups have gone almost entirely unnoticed in the academy – despite the increased academic interest in Polish politics of sexuality in the last two decades – might be due to RT being a relatively new phenomenon but arguably also due to its relative marginality (presently there are 'only' a handful of groups devoted specifically to RT in Poland). Thus, a careful analysis of RT in Poland opens up possibilities for engagement with the politics of sexuality that have not yet been explored in the Polish context and in this study I investigate the particular vision of the self, with its gendered and classed aspects, that RT reproduces and promotes as well as linking the practice back to the material flow of commodities. At this point a brief introduction of RT is due.

RT's modern era began in 1973, in the US when homosexuality was removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA).<sup>7</sup> RT in the US has been influenced mostly by theories of people like Irving Bieber, Charles Socarides, Joseph Nicolosi and Richard Cohen (Drescher, 1998). These scholars oppose the view of homosexuality as natural and argue that heterosexuality is the biological norm and that 'every homosexual is a latent heterosexual'

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<sup>7</sup> APA's decision has often been viewed as a move towards a more inclusive view of human sexuality, of which homosexuality is just one expression, but it is important to note that seven years later, in 1980, a decision was made to include Gender Identity Disorder in the very same manual.

(Bieber, 1962, p. 220). In addition, reparative therapists view family relations and parental influence as decisive factors in fostering homosexuality in boys and accordingly argue that, homosexual men are raised by overprotective and dominant mothers and distant, weak or detached fathers (Socarides, 1968, p. 38). Richard Cohen's International Healing Foundation (IHF), an organization aimed to help people deal with 'unwanted' Same Sex Attraction (SSA), stresses 'over attachment to opposite-sex parent' and 'detachment from same-gender parent' alongside pornography and sexual abuse as some of the factors that determine SSA (International Healing Foundation, 2013). The focus of reparative therapy is to revert the damage done by these factors and to help individuals reconnect with their 'true', heterosexual selves. Moreover, reparative therapists like Joseph Nicolosi argue that male homosexuality is a deficit in masculine identity:

I myself take the view that homosexuality is a developmental disorder and is potentially preventable. I see strong evidence for the classic psychodynamic position that homosexual behavior is rooted in a sense of gender-identity deficit, and representative of a drive to "repair" that deficit (Nicolosi, 2009b).

The National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH), cofounded by Nicolosi and Socarides in 1992, which constitutes one of the most prominent institutions devoted to reparative therapy in the US, echoes the view of homosexuality as an abnormal and treatable condition, adding the concept of natural design into the equation:

Biological influences may indeed influence some people toward homosexuality (...) but none of these factors mean that homosexuality is normal and a part of human design, or that it is inevitable in such people, or that it is unchangeable (National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality, 2013).

The concept of natural design is an important part of reparative therapy's theoretical basis. As one can read on Nicolosi's website, this design is in line with the Judeo-Christian understanding of human nature:

The Judeo-Christian concept of humanity and traditional psychodynamic psychology share the same understanding: the concept that human nature is supposed to "function according to its design." [They] both envision humankind as part of a universal heterosexual natural order (Nicolosi, 2009a).

The openly religious outlook and methods of RT have contributed to the view of its practitioners being thinly disguised theologians whose main aim is to reassert that gender differences and sexualities are divinely created, and ordained (Robinson & Spivey, 2007). Additionally, over recent years, RT has suffered some setbacks in the country of its origin where an increasing number of states have taken steps to regulate it. Nevertheless, American RT organizations continue to seek new markets internationally in which to promote their particular vision of human sexuality. The global aspirations are for instance manifested through a feature on NARTH's website that provides resources in 8 languages (including Polish) and NARTH's international division the International Federation for Therapeutic Choice, which was formed:

to give a greater voice to therapists, academics, and interested individuals located outside the United States who are members of the Alliance for Therapeutic Choice and Scientific Integrity (NARTH Institute), and to defend the rights of therapists to treat unwanted homosexuality throughout the world (National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality, 2017).

Despite the closing down of Exodus International – whose activities were restricted to North America – it is business as usual for Exodus Global Alliance (EGA) (Exodus Global Alliance, 2013), an international umbrella organization for reparative therapy groups around the world. EGA's website provides a multitude of resources, including articles, books, video tutorials and translations into eleven languages (Exodus Global Alliance, 2015). It is through the activities of individuals such as Nicolosi and Cohen – and their organizations – that RT has made its way to Poland.

On the 17th of March 2004 Cohen was invited to hold a talk in the Polish Parliament.<sup>8</sup> He delivered a presentation – entitled '*The Promotion of Homosexuality in Social Life and Its Effects for the Human Person, Family and Culture*' – in which he called upon the Polish Parliament to give him ten million dollars to 'heal' Polish homosexuals (Kitlinski & Leszkowicz, 2005). Cohen justified his request thusly: "The reason I ask for ten million dollars is because we need to create social organizations to help homosexuals to change"

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<sup>8</sup> Cohen was invited by *Liga Polskich Rodzin*, LPR, (League of Polish Families), (Kitlinski & Leszkowicz, 2005). LPR was a conservative, anti-EU, nationalist, political party closely associated with the ultra-conservative *Radio Maryja* (Radio Mary). At the time of Cohen's appearance LPR held 36 seats in *Sejm* (lower house of the Polish parliament). In the 2007 parliamentary elections LPR failed to meet the 5% threshold to remain in *Sejm*.

(Cohen, cited in Kitlinski & Leszkowicz, 2005; p. 28). Besides Cohen's IHF, at least two other major American reparative therapy organizations engaged in similar promotional campaigns in Poland; Regeneration Ministries held a conference in Warsaw in 2008, whilst Nicolosi of NARTH held one in Poznań in 2011 (Thomas Aquinas Psychological Clinic, 2017). The three Polish RT organizations – *Odwaga*, *Pomoc 2002* and *Pascha* – that this study focuses on are a direct or an indirect result of those interventions and as such they draw heavily on theories of US, and to a lesser degree on Western European, Reparative Therapists. On a practical level, and as I will explore in more detail in Chapter 6, these groups offer a variety of services such as support/prayer groups, therapy sessions, seminars, meetings, as well as weekend workshops all aimed to help with 'unwanted' same-sex attractions.

While the growth of RT has been rather contained in Poland, the number of groups offering support to people who wish to reorient their sexual desire remains relatively stable. Most recently, in the summer of 2017 *Odwaga* was awarded the Truth-Cross-Liberation award for 'spiritual and therapeutic help for people with unwanted same sex attractions and their families'; other recipients of the award included the Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydło, the award ceremony took place in the Ministry of Development and the current president, Andrzej Duda sent a letter to all present at the event (TVP.Info, 2017). This event is symptomatic of not only the current political atmosphere around LGBT issues in Poland under the rule of PiS, but also that groups like *Odwaga* are well established in the landscape of Polish politics of sexuality, even if until now they have largely escaped academic scrutiny. What enables their operation is a combination of factors, of which some will be explored in more depth in the following chapters of this thesis. However, the conservative stance of the Polish Roman Catholic Church on issues of LGBT equality discussed above can certainly be pointed out as one such factor.

Finally, whilst a large body of literature exists on RT in the US, the topic has been largely ignored by sexuality studies and RT is most often written about within psychology and studies of religion. Yet, omitting analyses of RT from studies of sexuality and LGBT politics, both on individual, local and global levels, obscures an area in which many ideological, as well as personal, battles are being fought. Last but not least, in this study I also link RT to the



larger processes of neoliberalization, offering a different perspective on this complex phenomenon. Here once again I integrate the work done on the ways in which neoliberalization affects the ways people think of themselves and the social world around them, and in the case of RT how they think of their sexuality – this is done in Chapter 6 – with political-economy of neoliberal market logic, that explain the flows of RT as a commodity; I return to that aspect in the final chapter of this thesis.

#### **1.3.4 Poland's neoliberal transformation**

In its most basic understanding, neoliberalism denotes a theory of political economy premised upon the conviction that ‘human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills’, which in turn is best facilitated within an institutional framework characterized by free market, free trade and strong property rights (Harvey, 2007, p. 2). As already signaled, I discuss neoliberalism and the processes that accompany it in more depth in Chapter 2, however, what I want to do here is to sketch out its localized incarnation by discussing how it came to prominence in contemporary Poland.

Firstly, Poland's rapid transition to market democracy in 1989 referred to as ‘shock therapy’ was engineered and implemented by a hardline neoliberal Finance Minister, Leszek Balcerowicz, with help from people such as Jeffrey Sachs, a professor of economics at Harvard, and approved by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. It is international institutions such as the IMF, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Bank (WB) that came to epitomize neoliberalism in its political economic understanding. Yet, it would be oversimplifying to discuss neoliberalization in the Polish context as a *deus ex machina* phenomenon unrelated to what has been going on in the country before 1989. Thus, for instance the prevalence of informal economy (Pawlik, 1991) and relative loosening of state control in the second half of the 1980s facilitated not only the eventual move towards market economy on the macro level, but also an explosion of micro entrepreneurial activities in the decade that followed the fall of state socialism (see for example Morawska, 1999; 1991). This way of understanding the processes of neoliberalization in the Polish context is very much in line with Wendy Larner's (2000, p. 16) observation that ‘emergence of new political projects is never a

complete rupture with what has gone before, but rather is part of an ongoing process involving the recomposition of political rationalities, programmes and identities.’ Furthermore and not unrelatedly, the Polish middle classes and elites supported the neoliberal transformation and the high levels of approval for the first post-communist government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki enabled the radical economic reforms to be enacted with little resistance from the population (Kramer, 1995). Moreover, rather than being brought in externally, the neoliberal ideas that became the basis of the transformation had been worked out through transnational networks fostered throughout the Cold War between American and Eastern European, including Polish, economists (Bockman & Eyal, 2002).

Secondly, the process of EU accession negotiations and eventual joining of the Union that came to dominate much of the 1990s and 2000s reinforced the processes of neoliberalization as the EU became ‘the conduit through which the neoliberal social and economic model’ came to be institutionalized in Europe (Wahl, 2004, p. 38). Admittedly, in Poland, during the 20+ years after the fall of state socialism, and as illustrated by Alison Stenning and her colleagues (2010, pp. 44-49), the commitment to neoliberal ideals has remained constant, and the neoliberal context became effectively ‘configured as the only rational course of action’ (Shields, 2011, p. 87). On a political level this has led to a particular paradox, when the processes of neoliberalization were embraced by what would be considered the left (most notably the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and the right alike.

It is not the aim of this study to account for the full scale of neoliberalization in Poland, yet certain characteristics of the Polish context are worth mentioning to contextualize its primacy. Accordingly, in Poland the Gini index that measures income distribution and inequality has grown from 25.2 in 1985 to 32.1 in 2014 (The World Bank, 2017)<sup>9</sup> whilst Poland also has the EU’s most flexible job market with more than one in five people working on temporary contracts (Eurostat, 2016) and one of the lowest proportion of employees in unions (12% in 2014) (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej,

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<sup>9</sup> Gini index, as defined by the World Bank with the range being between 0 (perfect equality) and 1 (here 100) perfect inequality, ‘measures the extent to which the distribution of income... among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution’ (The World Bank, 2017).

2014). Moreover, marketization (a move from planned to market economy) is an important aspect of neoliberalization and one of the main projects of the Polish transformation has been large scale denationalization of the economy through privatization of companies previously owned by the state; over 500 companies were partially or fully privatized in Poland in the years between 1988 and 2008 (The World Bank, 2015a, 2015b).<sup>10</sup> Poland also has one of the most regressive taxation systems in the EU – meaning that ‘the relative fiscal burden decreases as the taxpayer’s income increases’ (Tomkiewicz, 2016). Also, whilst the transformation has been hailed a success by many, its cost has been disproportionately carried by the working classes (Hardy, 2013; A. Smith, Stenning, Rochovská, & Świątek, 2008; Stenning, 2005) – and I return to this point in my discussion of the ‘losers’ and ‘winners’ of transformation below – and women in particular (Einhorn, 1993).

It is only in the most recent decade that voices of criticism can be heard in the mainstream in relation to the hardline neoliberal character of the transformation – with the emergence of leftist media outlets such as *Krytyka Polityczna*, Political Critique, or work of journalists such as Rafał Woś (2014) – and the costs thereof (Hardy, 2013; Stenning, Smith, Rochovská, & Świątek, 2010). The harsh reality of living in a neoliberally ordered society has arguably become the basis for PiS’ electoral success, and PiS won the 2015 parliamentary election on a range of social promises. At the same time, politically and as exemplified by PiS, resistance to neoliberalism in Poland has ‘been centered on a set of anti-political, populist gestures associated with the emergence of a new right and the steady disappearance of the left since 1989’ (Shields, 2015, p. 662).<sup>11</sup> Thus, whilst the current PiS government has taken some (at times dubious) steps towards greater redistribution (most notably with the introduction of the minimum hourly wage in January 2017 and the 500+ programme aimed at supporting families with children),<sup>12</sup> and against ‘foreign

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<sup>10</sup> Despite the global economic crisis, the processes of privatisation accelerated further in the years between 2007 and 2011 (Krzemiński, 2012). Only in 2012 a further 113 companies were privatised, the process slowed down with 77 companies in 2013 and only fifteen in 2016 (Ministerstwo Skarbu Państwa, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> The emergence of *Razem* (Together), a political party with a very strong anti-neoliberal message in 2015 elections can be seen as a response, however marginal, from the left.

<sup>12</sup> The programme was inaugurated in 2016 and it offers a benefit of 500 PLN (ca. 100 GBP) per month for each second and every next child, the benefit is available to all families regardless of income. It is also available for the first child for low income parents (Rodzina 500+, 2017).

capital' (aimed at lowering the share of foreign stakeholders in Polish banks – the so called 'repolonisation of banks') (Węglewski, 2016), it would take much more than these random efforts to undo the three decades of neoliberalization and the resulting unequal distribution of resources.<sup>13</sup>

To sum up, the move from state socialism to market democracy in Poland has been executed with neoliberal ideas at its core and at the time when these were arguably at their most popular (Harvey, 2007), a point I return to in the next chapter. Over the decades that followed, Polish governments (both left and right of the political spectrum) remained faithful to the neoliberal model of the state and society. This has had profound consequences for the way the Polish society developed in the new circumstances after the fall of state socialism in 1989 and, as I aim to demonstrate in this thesis, it has also been hugely consequential for the bottom up politics of sexuality and the development of the Polish LGBT movement(s). Linking politics of sexuality to processes of neoliberalization in Poland offers new ways of thinking through both and this study aims to contribute to such way of analyzing and theorizing them. However, before I move on to outlining in more detail the knowledge contributions this study aims to make, I want to briefly turn my attention to the question of class and the particular challenge of class analysis in Poland.

### **1.3.5 Class in postsocialist Poland**

[I]n contemporary Eastern Europe class position allocated on the basis of occupational titles is a marker for a wide range of inequalities of resources and conditions. These inequalities reflect the fates experienced – and expected – by members of different social classes during the process of transition [from socialism to capitalism]... (Evans & Mills, 1999; p. 42).

Investigating class in Poland is not an easy task and scholarly analyses that discuss class in the Polish context are few and far between. Is it because class is no longer a relevant concept for analysis of Polish postsocialist reality? Has socialism rendered class irrelevant? Is Poland a classless society? Have we developed better analytical tools to replace class analysis in Poland's new capitalist reality? The answer to all of these questions is 'no' and the relevance

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<sup>13</sup> Additionally, as Stuart Shields (2015) argues, populism and neoliberalism can happily coexist and 'the populist turn in Poland has inadvertently strengthened neoliberalism' (Shields, 2015, p. 666).

of class as an analytical category is illustrated by its productive use in investigations of Polish society and its structure (Domański, 2015; Gdula & Sadura, 2012; Słomczyński, Janicka, Shabad, & Tomescu-Dubrow, 2007), also in relation to neoliberalism (Kalb, 2009; Stenning, 2005). Nevertheless, work that examines, or even speaks of class in Poland is an exception rather than the rule. Such state of affairs can on the one hand be considered a legacy of the previous regime, or more precisely, of certain ways of understanding state socialism as a system that neutralized class divisions<sup>14</sup> (based on the elimination of private ownership of the means of production) whilst also being overinvested in a particular form of class politics (in relation to fetishization of the working class identities and lives<sup>15</sup>). In result, decades after the fall of state socialism, class analysis is often dismissed as either irrelevant or anachronistic. However, whilst the socialist regime in Poland did use the language of class for self-legitimation, it was also largely unsuccessful at abolishing class differences on any, other than a symbolic, level, with the exception of the prestige and high salaries it awarded to some skilled (male) workers, coal miners being a prime example (Domański, 2015). Thus, Henryk Domański argues that not only is class an important factor in determining people's life chances in Poland today (2015, p. 247), but that class structure of the Polish society has remained surprisingly stable in the face of the regime change (2015, p. 144), even if the distance between the classes has grown as evidenced by the polarization of incomes. Słomczyński and Janicka (2008) refer to the dynamic of social-class polarization in Poland as the Mathew Effect, a phenomenon that could be summarized in colloquial terms as 'the rich get richer and the poor get poorer' (Słomczyński & Janicka, 2008, p. 342). The effects of this polarization, which was observed already in the 1990s, have been predicted to result in the increasing prominence of class in political life in Poland and in the rest of the region (Evans and Mills, 1999).

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<sup>14</sup> Słomczyński et al. describe this thusly: 'Commonly accepted conceptualizations of the class structure of a socialist society rely on the presumption that control of the economy by the state reduces the importance of the defining distinction involving ownership of the means of production' (2007; p. 48).

<sup>15</sup> For example, Allison Stenning (2005) notes: 'The central importance of working-class communities within the socialist regimes of east central Europe and the Soviet Union tended to encourage extreme representations of working-class communities – ranging from the heroic to the ridiculous' (p. 987).

However, and relatedly, whilst class divisions do exist in Poland and the distance between classes has grown, class sensibilities remain weak (Ost, 1993, 1995). Thus, David Ost points to the lack of class organization – that in capitalist societies manifests itself through ‘seeking to lay hold of the state in order to have the state serve its interests against the interests of other classes’ – as a defining feature of the Polish political landscape during postsocialism (Ost, 1993; p. 460). Ost’s more recent work (2010) adds an interesting dimension to the ‘why’ of such a condition, as he points out that in Poland in the 1990s the ruling elites, in their ‘neoliberal certainty’ – to borrow Ost’s term (2010, p. 262) – made a conscious effort to suppress the possibility of grievances related to the harsh reality of the transformation from being framed in the language of class, focusing instead on cultural battles over issues of national identity and morality (Ost, 2010, p. 258). This is of relevance as it also points to the way in which marginalization of class analysis under neoliberalism does not *just* happen, but rather it occurs as a result of decisions made by the social groups that benefit from it. Arguably, what such marginalization of class from the public debate in Poland produced was a necessity to express the issues of material inequality in novel ways and the narrative of *winner*s and *loser*s of the transformation is such an innovation, a point I discuss next.

#### ***1.3.5.1 Winning and losing at transition***

[W]ith the passage of time [in the new post-1989 political regime] the poor (the entire class at the bottom) become poorer, and the poorest among them (15% of the lowest segment) become impoverished to a particularly high degree (Słomczyński & Janicka, 2008, p. 348).

There appears to be a consensus in place that different classes have been affected differently by the political and economic changes that took place in Poland after 1989. This difference of outcomes is often narrated in the language of the *winner*s and *loser*s of the transformation. Krzysztof Jasiewicz (2009, p. 497) defines the *loser*s most basically as persons ‘whose standards of living declined after 1989 in real or even only relative terms’; accordingly, the *winner*s are those people for whom the transformation brought about an improvement of standards of living, in real or relative terms. At the same time,

implementation of the new economic model favored the privileged rather than marginalized classes (Słomczyński & Janicka, 2008, p. 342) and the social groups most commonly categorized as *losers* are (unskilled) workers and farmers:

Members of the salariat and entrepreneurial classes, for example, are not only more likely to report increases in living standards since the end of communism, but expect these to continue. In contrast, 'peasants' and the working class predominantly report decline in their economic situation ... Similar patterns occur for perceptions promotion prospects (Evans & Mills, 1999, p. 42).

The “losers” of the systemic change were unqualified workers, farmers, elders, and some members of the intelligentsia (Polanska, 2010, p. 422).

Notably, the rhetoric of *winner*s and *loser*s is a prevalent one in academic, as well as popular, writings on the effects of the transition on people’s lives and the terms are practically omnipresent, regardless of the particular focus of the authors (see also Binnie, 2014, p. 253; Shields, 2012, p. 372). Table 3.1 taken from Słomczyński and Janicka’s (2008) article visualizes not only the respective position of each class on the *winner*s/*loser*s divide but also, inadvertently, the point made by Domański, on the relative stability of the Polish class structure.

Table 1.1. Social classes in Poland before and after 1989

Before 1989	After 1989
<b>Nomenklatura</b> Socialist executives Experts (small proportion)	<b>Privileged Classes (Winners)</b> Employers Managers Experts (professionals)
<b>Core of the socialist economy</b> Experts (large proportion) First-line supervisors Office workers Factory workers	<b>Ordinary classes</b> Supervisors Self-employed Office workers
<b>Non-specialist segment</b> Self-employed	<b>Disadvantaged classes (Losers)</b> Skilled workers Unskilled workers Farmers
<b>Marginalized classes</b> Non-industrial manual workers Peasantry	

Source: Słomczyński and Janicka (2008, p. 345).

What we can see from table 3.1 is the relatively seamless transition of the top echelons of society into the new reality. Thus, the character of the

transformation privileged those, who were often already better placed to face the change, having more social capital and material resources.<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, the very categorization of people as *losers* and *winner*s of the transformation is problematic and I find the work it does troubling; it evokes game imagery, as if the result was down to chance and/or the individual skills of the *players* and not choices made by the elites in charge of the process, which in turn obscures the unequal distribution of power over the process as well as of the costs thereof. Hence, what the *winner*s and *loser*s narrative emphasizes is the outcome and not the economic processes through which certain groups of people become disenfranchised and disproportionately so, as it was the working classes that carried the burden of the transformation. Also, in a manner similar to the way Bev Skeggs (2004, p. 86) discusses ‘social exclusion’, what happens with the *loser*s and *winner*s rhetoric is that it becomes ‘a condition people are in, not something that is done to them’. What is also at stake in such classifications becomes visible when the *winner*s and *loser*s logic is extended to whole regions of Poland as in Weltrowska’s (2002) study:

The transformation has brought about polarized regional development. Czyż (1998) and Szlachta (1995) have identified two groups of winner and loser regions, which emerged during the critical 1990–4 period (Weltrowska, 2002, p. 49).

The subject and the agentive force of the sentence above, as often when the issue is discussed, is *the transformation* and not the elites who were in charge of its character and implementation. At the same time, the division of regions into those that perform well in the new system and those that fail to do so is an oversimplification that obscures more than it explains. This is not to say that

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<sup>16</sup> It is therefore also not surprising that attitudes of social groups towards the previous regime differ depending on how they were affected in the process of transformation, with the privileged demonstrating ‘a regular and substantive decrease in positive assessment of socialism’ and disadvantaged groups demonstrating ‘an overall increase of positive attitudes towards the past regime’ (Słomczynski et al., 2007; p. 45, 55). Similarly, attitudes towards the processes of Europeanization have a class dimension, as observed by Jasiewicz:

[T]he strongest pro-EU attitudes have been recorded among... well-educated and relatively affluent young urban professionals. Conversely, the strongest opposition to the European Union has come from poor and poorly educated older dwellers of rural areas... Being an actual loser in the process of transition... increased chances of this person objecting to the EU accession (Jasiewicz, 2009, p. 469).



there is no spatial dimension to disenfranchisement in Poland, rather that a lens capable of a more nuanced way of addressing it is needed, to avoid sweeping generalizations and masking of the decision making process that brought about the effective devolution of many spaces. Research suggests that certain spaces in Poland are marked by strong class differences, such as the middle class gated communities discussed by Polanska (2010) or the working class housing districts in old industrial cities and on former state farms (Stenning, 2005). By paying attention to class these theorizations establish a link to the structural changes that occurred in Poland and thus offer a more concrete picture of the reality than the abstract binary of *winner*s and *loser*s can ever afford.

Moreover, and linking to the discussion of individualization in Chapter 2, *winning* or *losing* in the game of transition is also often expressed in terms of individual skills, such as adaptability, as in Pasięka's statement: "winners' and 'losers' of transformation: those who successfully adapted to new socioeconomic conditions and those who failed' (Pasięka, 2012, p. 73). This view implicitly places the responsibility for the outcome of the transformation on the micro level with the 'players' whose success or the lack thereof can be explained by their individual skillset; here once again, the structural forces and the macro dimension remain hidden from the view.

This far I have highlighted that attention to the classed reality of the changes that happened in Poland over the last two decades is necessary and that the *winner*s and *loser*s narrative obscures the structural inequality of the processes of transformation. Finally, what is also worth pointing out is that sensitivity to class is also needed when one is faced with congratulatory accounts of how successful the transformation process has been (see for instance Applebaum, 2001; Lenain, 2000) Considering the deepening of the social divides and the increase in both relative and absolute poverty, in particular in the period from 1998 to 2005 (Brzeziński, 2010) it is important to remember that the 'success' is far from equally distributed and that it has a very real class dimension, as the scholarship discussed above suggests. In the words of Don Kalb:

In the Polish case... celebratory discourses of successful democratization, economic growth, transition, and EU accession obscure deep local histories of dispossession, disenfranchisement, and dedemocratization (sic.) (Kalb, 2009, p.

These histories of dispossession are classed and they can also be classing, as it can serve the interests of the privileged classes by individualizing the results of what were profound structural changes and effectively obscuring the disproportionate costs these have had for the working classes.

To sum up, the limited body of literature that addresses the issue of class in Poland directly indicates that class *is* indeed a very relevant category in looking at the social reality of postsocialist Poland and that whilst suppressing class analysis might have helped to legitimize the new, neoliberal order it has everything but made class differences irrelevant. Moreover, feminist analyses of the transformation demonstrate the complex ways in which neoliberalization affects people differently in postsocialism, depending on how their lives are gendered as well as classed, a point I revisit in Chapter 2. Similarly, as class remains an important factor in people's lives in contemporary Poland, to omit it from studies of sexuality can only ever produce accounts that are partial and disconnected from the material reality in which sexual politics are made, remade, and contested. Thus, bringing class into the debates on sexuality is central to my intervention.

#### **1.4 Thesis structure and contributions to knowledge**

This thesis is divided into eight chapters, of which this introduction is the first one. The second chapter reviews the relevant sets of literature that this study is informed by and on which it builds, starting with a discussion of feminist materialism as the political backbone of this project. With this study I aim to add to the feminist materialist analyses of sexuality. I do this by exploring the ways in which material conditions and structural change circumscribe and shape bottom up politics of sexuality and how class and gender position people unequally in relation to the resources and, by extension, freedoms available in neoliberally orientated market democracy. Also in Chapter 2, I discuss the literature on neoliberalism, individualization, and the role of psychotherapeutics in the shaping of neoliberal subjectivities. I then review the sets of literatures that theorise how sexuality and neoliberalism link, paying attention to questions of class, gender, and location. The aim is to situate my project within these

current debates but also to point to the particular limits of each of these bodies of knowledges. Thus, whilst building on a set of literatures, this project aims to both enrich and, at times, put to test the theories that inform it. It also aims to address existing research gaps and I discuss the specific contributions each chapter aims to make on both an empirical as well as theoretical level below.

Chapter 3 is a detailed account of the two contexts that are of relevance to my study; divided into two parts, it looks at the politics of sexuality in contemporary Poland (paying particular attention to the LGBT movement and issues of homophobia) and at the emergence, development, premises, and spread of RT in the US and worldwide. In terms of methods, this project relies on a mixed method approach, combining semi-structured in depth interviews, supported by a short survey, with discourse analysis of RT groups websites (including mission statements and online testimonies of RT participants published on these). The interviews with Polish LGBT activists, members of WiT as well as with past participants of RT groups were all conducted during fieldwork in multiple locations in Poland from June 2015 until April 2016. Chapter 4 offers a detailed account of my methodological approach, the process behind the data production and analysis, and the ethical considerations and challenges encountered. It also positions my study methodologically in relation to feminist methodologies and research practices.

As already mentioned, in this project I examine three separate, but linked empirical sites in the landscape of contemporary Polish grassroots politics of sexuality: LGBT organizing, Christian LGBT organizing, and Reparative Therapy (RT) and my aim is to add to the knowledges of each of these phenomena. Thus, in general, on an empirical level this study aims to contribute to the knowledge of the situation of LGBT people in Poland today. It also aims to broaden the discussion around the Polish LGBT movement by including voices of Christian LGBT people, and LGBT activists from a range of locations across the country, as well as shifting the often metrocentric focus of scholarship on the LGBT movement by exploring the way small town/village to urban migration feeds into LGBT organizing.

Consequently, Chapter 5, 6 and 7 are the three chapters in which I analyze the data produced for this study. Chapter 5 is devoted to my analysis of Christian LGBT organizing – as exemplified by the WiT group – its place

within the broader LGBT movement in Poland, the role of gender in its project and its politics. My work with and on WiT aims to contribute to the knowledge of the particular position that LGBT Christians occupy in the Polish LGBT movement, challenging the understanding of the Polish LGBT movement as always already in opposition to religion and enriching our understanding of the ways in which the Polish LGBT movement is developing in Poland today. My discussion of WiT's project in relation to politics of homonormativity aims to offer a set of insights on homonormative impulses and politics in a context that does not provide LGBT people with state or legal support, often theorised as a basis for homonormativity (Duggan, 2003); it also aims to add to the debates on how homonormativity is mediated locally and in relation to existing regimes of patriarchal gender relations, of which the Catholic Church in Poland is a stark example. My analysis of WiT leads me to propose that WiT's politics can best be understood through what I term *godly homonormativity*.

In Chapter 6 I investigate the practice of RT, paying attention to how the practice is gendered, as well as to the individualizing and self-responsibilizing premises it rests on. My analysis demonstrates how the neoliberal ideas and ideals of the self permeate the practice of RT, mobilizing the tropes of individual effort and responsibility for the reorientation of one's sexual desire, obscuring the inherent inequality on which the practice is based. Informed by my interviews with past participants of RT groups, I offer a unique insight into the largely unstudied phenomenon of RT in contemporary Poland as well as illuminating potential harm of sexual reorientation efforts. In a context where the practice of RT remains unregulated – much like the vast field of therapeutic activities in general – this study aims to shed some much needed light on what happens to people who engage in RT, their motivations and how their individual lives are affected by the practice. In times when the current government deems it appropriate to reward RT organizations with medals, whilst the official professional bodies have been slow to react to the phenomenon – it was not until November 2016 that the Polish Sexological Society officially condemned RT (Polskie Towarzystwo Seksuologiczne, 2016)<sup>17</sup> – understanding the scope and impact of RT becomes arguably even more pressing. Moreover, my attempt

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<sup>17</sup> Prior to my fieldwork, in June 2016 I emailed the Polish Sexological Society and asked about their official position on RT; I received no answer to my email.

to theorise RT through the lens of individualization and self-responsibilization has potential to add to the debates on how the logic of neoliberalism becomes internalized and embodied in everyday practices and choices. By extension, my analysis of the ways in which RT is gendered can also add to the feminist critiques of the male middle class subject at the centre of neoliberal ideology. Whilst my discussion of WiT is very different from my analysis of RT, here also I aim to contribute to the body of literature that examines how subjectivities are shaped and remade to reflect the neoliberal ideas and ideals of the self.

Chapter seven brings together issues of location and class in relation to LGBT movement, WiT and RT. Here I explore the classed character of the Polish LGBT movement, both Christian and mainstream. What I also hope to achieve with my class sensitive analysis is a fuller view of the demographic make up of the Polish LGBT movement and by extension, a better picture of whether and how its goals and initiatives are affected by the positionality of the people within it. Adding to my analysis of the intersection of class and sexuality, I also discuss the classed character of RT, pointing to the way in which, not unlike psychotherapeutics at large, RT in Poland is an option for people with sufficient economic resources. It is also in Chapter 7 that I examine the metrocentrist and classist assumption that mark certain spaces in contemporary Poland as inherently LGBT-hostile. At the same time, my engagement with a variety of LGBT organizations across the country aims to provide a more nuanced view of the geography of the Polish LGBT movement and its development, not only in time but also space; a development that, as I demonstrate, has been far from linear.

The last chapter, Chapter 8, offers a discussion of the complex ways in which neoliberalization bears on politics of sexuality in Poland today, including my proposition of viewing RT as an example of *commodification of homophobia*. It is also in Chapter 8 that I discuss the neoliberal pressures under which the Polish LGBT movements operate. Thinking through politics of sexuality in Poland in relation to neoliberalization is not something that has been done before and I build on a range of knowledges that have been generated most frequently in ‘Western’ locations to address the way capitalism and neoliberalism influence politics of sexuality, and I also acknowledge the

limitations of this approach where appropriate. At the same time, focusing on the Polish context this study offers a unique perspective on the ways in which neoliberalization bears on politics of sexuality in a context that has been an experiment in intensive neoliberalization over the last three decades. Thus, whilst the aim of this study is to contribute to the debates on sexuality and neoliberalization in general, it is my hope that it will also be useful for understanding the relationship between these two in postsocialism. In both instances, I hope to add value to the debates on the ways in which material conditions, class and gender matter for politics of sexuality and for the lives of LGBT people. Here, I also aim to contribute to the theories of homophobia with my proposal of theorizing RT as a form of *commodification of homophobia*, drawing on and also adding to the body of literature that discusses commodification of LGBT lives, and identities. In addition, my discussion in Chapter 8 also aims to enrich the existing body of knowledge on the global flows of RT, as an ideology and as a product, with both of these aspects constituting areas that remain largely understudied.

It is also in Chapter 8 that I point to areas of further research, for which this study hopes to lay the groundwork, as well as considering the specific contributions this project makes. Finally, Chapter 8 also offers a conclusion, which sums up the findings, the issues discussed and the implications thereof for the questions raised in this study.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In this study I investigate the ways in which processes of neoliberalization shape the politics of sexuality in contemporary Poland. I do so by examining how individual subjectivities and collective endeavours of LGBT people are shaped by individualization, commodification, and the expansion of the market into ever more spheres of life, as well as how differences of class, gender, and location position subjects differently within the landscape of the politics of sexuality. To address these questions, my engagement with existing literatures happens across many ‘fields’ and necessarily also across disciplines, and this chapter brings the relevant theoretical strands together. As noted in the introduction, I am working from the premise that material conditions matter for the politics of sexuality and that these should be studied relationally. I investigate three empirical sites: the LGBT movement, Christian LGBT organizing, and Reparative Therapy and this study examines the spread into and effects of neoliberalization on these sites. I am also concerned with the gendered, classed, and localized inequalities that are (re)produced at these sites and the locally specific collusions of patriarchal dominance and neoliberal regimes that sustain such reproducing. Importantly, I use ‘patriarchal’ as a descriptive rather than analytical term here and throughout this study, a point I return to below. Thinking through politics of sexuality in Poland in relation to processes of neoliberalization is not something that has been done before and to address these questions I integrate sets of literatures that theorise sexuality, gender, class, and location in relation to capitalism and neoliberalism. A few introductory thoughts are thus in order to account for how I approach the varied bodies of knowledge my study builds on.

Firstly, in sketching a theoretical map of this project I draw on both scholarship that theorizes neoliberalism in its economic-material dimension, as well as on the body of literature that examines how subjectivities are constituted under neoliberal conditions. Of particular relevance here is the scholarly work

that engages with the ways in which under neoliberalism subjectivities come to reflect its ideological underpinnings, through individualization and the construction of the self as an enterprise; relatedly, the literature on how psychotherapeutics are complicit in these processes becomes central. It is these aspects of neoliberalization that I focus on in my discussion of Reparative Therapy as well as, to an extent, in my framing of homonormativity. The more material dimensions of neoliberalization inform my examination of the LGBT movement with its classed dimensions, but also RT as an enterprise, as well as my discussion of politics of sexuality in Poland in relation to geographical location. Importantly, I acknowledge that the literature on the political economy of neoliberalism and the more constructivist understandings of how subjects are constituted within it are two separate analytical traditions. Still, I choose to integrate them for the purpose of my analysis, as it enables me to make sense of the empirical sites I investigate and to better understand the narratives of the people who occupy them, as well as their own classed, gendered, and localized ways of making sense of these sites and their own place within these. The aim is thus to examine how the individual stories link to the structural processes and forces that shape the material conditions in which these are generated. It is not to deny the agency of the people who are behind them, but to hold their stories analytically together in relation to these larger processes of which they are also part. Notably, agency here can mean compliance, consent as well as resistance (Pollert, 1996).

Secondly, and importantly, my own view of neoliberalization is informed by and formed through the feminist critiques of it, and I build on these critiques of the gendered and classed aspects of neoliberalization to account for the inequalities that arise and are reproduced in contemporary Poland at the sites I examine in this study. Whilst, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 3, there is a large body of literature that discusses politics of sexuality and the LGBT movement in Poland in the last three decades, surprisingly little work has been done on whether and how these are classed and gendered. Similarly, questions of location are often handled superficially, if they are addressed at all. Moreover, the focus tends to be on the prevailing cultural homophobia in the context of the often taken for granted positive developments and opportunities that the transition from state socialism to market democracy, and in particular



EU accession, have brought, most notably in terms of LGBT politics and organizing. This is, in my view, done to the detriment of analyses that would scrutinize the negative effects of the overwhelmingly neoliberal transformation on the developmental paths available to the newly emerged LGBT movement in Poland.

Moreover, I engage with the ways the relationship between politics of sexuality and capitalism, and its neoliberal stage has been theorised, and build on both the insights of the work done on politics of homonormativity, as well as on the ways in which capitalism shapes LGBT lives and identities. Here, two distinct research gaps emerge that my project responds to. On the one hand, the literature on homonormativity I review below theorizes well the way in which under certain conditions gays and lesbians are granted some limited freedoms within the established, heteronormative order, epitomized in the right to marry and/or adopt children. Yet, a context in which I examine homonormative impulses is characterized by a stark lack of such legal/state support. Thus, this study enriches the knowledge of homonormativity in contexts other than the liberal democracies of the West. On the other hand, work done on capitalism and LGBT politics often focuses on identities and commodity flows that late capitalism enables. However, it rarely examines the ways in which homophobia can become commodified, a point that I develop in relation to the phenomenon of Reparative Therapy.

Last, but not least, and as signaled above, this study is an investigation of the collusions between locally and individually mediated effects of neoliberalization and locally generated regimes of patriarchal power and it is held together by what for me becomes the overarching theoretical, but also political, commitment of this study. Examining politics of sexuality in Poland in a particular historical moment and in relation to neoliberalism, on a meta-level this project is an investigation into, and a critique of, this specific capitalist formation. The framework it rests upon is informed by what can be best subsumed under the label of materialist feminism and – considering the focus on politics of sexuality – in particular the version thereof formulated by Rosemary Hennessy in her book *'Profit and pleasure: sexual identities in late capitalism'* (2000), to which I return below. Accordingly, it is through the lens developed in Hennessy's work that I attempt to make sense of the relationship

between sexual politics and neoliberalism in postsocialist Poland and it is through that lens that class and gender, and their intertwined relationship with sexuality and location become central. Admittedly, Hennessy is not the first scholar to engage with the questions around capitalism's influence over politics of sexuality and similar points in particular on the occlusion of class from analyses of sexuality have been made by Wendy Brown (1995) in her '*State of injury*' whilst the work of Nancy Fraser (1996) has attempted to theorise the tension between what she frames as politics of recognition and politics of redistribution. In her nominal text Fraser writes:

Demands for 'recognition of difference' fuel struggles of groups mobilized under the banners of nationality, ethnicity, 'race', gender, and sexuality. In these 'post-socialist' conflicts, group identity supplants class interest as the chief medium of political mobilization. Cultural domination supplants exploitation as the fundamental injustice. And cultural recognition displaces socioeconomic redistribution as the remedy for injustice and the goal of political struggle (Fraser, 1995, p. 68).

Fraser's dual system theory of redistribution and recognition as the two primary forms of injustice positions political economy and culture as the two opposite categories (ibid.) whereas in her view, 'identity-based claims tend to predominate, as prospects for redistribution appear to recede' (Fraser, 1995, p. 70). The debate that ensued between Fraser (Fraser, 1995, p. 70) and Judith Butler (1998) is an often cited example of how the cultural quest for recognition that in particular queer theory – focusing on identities and cultural performativity – has been accused of (Butler, 1998) differs from the more material one for redistribution that pays attention to questions of socio-economic inequalities and class. Butler's response pointed out, amongst other things, that 'the charge that new social movements are 'merely cultural' and 'that a unified and progressive Marxism must return to a materialism based in an objective analysis of class' is based on a presumption that 'the distinction between material and cultural life is a stable one' (Butler, 1998, p. 36). Whilst this debate undoubtedly constitutes an important moment in the more recent history of feminist theorizing of difference and political economy, its main contribution can be seen in revitalizing interest in these questions, and Hennessy's work (2000) builds upon it. Significantly, Hennessy's materialist feminist take on these issues is that both scholarship and politics should address

more than the cultural and discursive, if they are to be effective at challenging the inequitable distribution of power and resources in capitalism and it this commitment that motives also my study. At the same time, culture and discourse remain important sites of scholarly intervention and investigation for the material effects of political economy are inevitably linked to culture. It is in the moments when political economy is omitted from academic investigation of culture that feminist materialism sees a threat to the former's emancipatory potential. In the following section of this chapter I offer a short overview of materialist feminism and its insights that I find relevant to my project.

The remaining part of this chapter is structured as follows: I begin by looking at theorizations of neoliberalism and engage with the ways in which the self becomes reworked in neoliberalism; this is done in relation to the literature on a) individualization and b) the self-governed and therapeutic self. I return to these issues in my analysis of Reparative Therapy in Chapter 6. I then move on to discussing the ways in which sexuality and class have been linked theoretically and how they have been discussed in relation to neoliberalism; these tropes are revisited in Chapter 7. Here, I also pay particular attention to discussions of commodification of LGBT lives and identities and review the work that has critiqued these processes. What follows is a discussion of homonormativity as the dominant sexual politics of neoliberalism – which is then revised in relation to WiT's project in Chapter 5. The chapter ends with a short conclusion. Last, but certainly not least, whilst no specific section is devoted to gender, gender analysis is interwoven throughout the chapter and I use gender as analytical tool with emphasis on the mutual shaping of class and gender, and their interconnectedness at all levels of social relations.

### **2.1.1 Materialist feminism**

Materialist feminism has been far from the dominant strand of inquiry in the academy – a condition that some materialist feminists view as symptomatic of academy's own compliance in the processes of mystification of capitalism and its neoliberal incarnation (Hennessy, 2000; Jackson, 2001). Nevertheless, it continues to produce valuable insights on capitalism and women's gendered and raced places within it (Hennessy, 2000; Hennessy & Ingraham, 1997).

Materialist feminism grew out of feminist critical engagements with the historical materialism of Marx and Engels and in response to their predominantly gender blind view of the social world. Whilst the different strands of knowledge that emerged from such engagements – materialist, Marxist, socialist – vary in their emphases and use of concepts, what they share is their acknowledgement of historical materialism’s potential as emancipatory critical knowledge (see for example M. Gimenez & Vogel, 2005; M. E. Gimenez, 2004; Jackson, 2001), a point that I consider both valid and relevant. Materialist feminism specifically was formulated in the late 1970s (Hennessy & Ingraham, 1997) and promoted by scholars such as Anette Kuhn and Anne Marie Wolpe (*Feminism and materialism : women and modes of production*, 1978), Michèle Barrett, and Mary McIntosh in Britain, and (Barrett & McIntosh, 1982) and Christine Delphy (1997) in France.<sup>18</sup> Critically deploying a Marxist framework, materialist feminism seeks to ‘disclose how activities are organized and how they are articulated to the social relations of the larger social and economic process’ (D. E. Smith, 1988, p. 152). A crucial distinction of materialist feminism from other strands of feminist thought ‘is the priority it gives to relations of labor necessary for survival’ (Hennessy, 2014, p. 322) which is not viewed in a reductionist way, but rather it is understood as ‘a process in which culture, including gender and sexuality’ feature prominently (ibid.) and I find this proposition particularly suitable for the aims of my project. Materialist feminism is thus devoted to systematic analysis, inasmuch that it takes the view that historically specific social totalities are under operation and that the local is linked through these to the macro level. At the same time its different strands vary in their understanding of which relations can be regarded as systemic. Consequently, whilst there is an agreement in regards to capitalism and its basis in the exploitative relations between the capital and wage labor, the analytical weight given to patriarchy varies from Delphy’s (1980) theorization of it as an autonomous mode of production, through a range of dual system theories that view patriarchy and capitalism as two interacting yet separate systems – most notably those proposed by Heidi Hartman (1981) and later Sylwia Walby (1986, 1989) – on the other spectrum are those who

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<sup>18</sup> Another early example is *The unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism : a debate on class and patriarchy* a volume edited by Heidi Hartmann and Lydia Sargent first published in 1981.

question the usefulness of viewing patriarchy as a separate system and propose instead that class and gender must be understood as always already intertwined. The latter approach has been championed by scholars such as Joan Acker (1988, 1989) and Anna Pollert (1996) and it is their particular understanding of the process of gendering as taking place *inside* class relations that I find the most compelling. Pollert (1996) argues that a separate theory of gender relations is unnecessary and risks losing site of such interconnectedness of gender and class. Instead, she postulates that what we have to do ‘is continually make women and gender visible, together with other dimensions of difference and inequality... within processual analysis’ (Pollert, 1996, p. 640). For her, ‘the reality of the self-perpetuation of male dominance does not... make it a structure, in the sense of containing a structural dynamic’; whilst durable, ‘men’s relationship to women does not contain mutually defining economic relationship’ equal to ‘the relations of capitalism to wage labor’ (Pollert, 1996, p. 650) and I agree with her way of thinking through this complex issue. This, in turn is arguably also a point where my analytical framework seemingly departs from Hennessy’s, on whose work I draw heavily otherwise; Hennessy views patriarchy as ‘a historically variant form of social organization’ that structures social life ‘such that more social resources and value accrue to men as a group at the expense of women as a group’; for Hennessy, because patriarchy bears on socioeconomic conditions and formations it is central to capitalism’s exploitative relations (Hennessy, 2000, pp. 23, 27). Yet, I would postulate that Hennessy’s actual use of patriarchy is descriptive rather than analytical. This is well illustrated by the following quote from *Profit and Pleasure*:

This relationship between the capitalist and worker... is the basic “motor” of capitalism... In order for capitalism as a mode of producing social life to persist, this basic material inequality has to be agreed to and legitimized. This legitimation process takes place through an array of beliefs, norms, narratives, images and modes of intelligibility, loosely referred as culture-ideology. Culture-ideology consists of a variety of different practices or ways of making sense... that displace, condense, compensate, mask, and contest the basic inequality of capitalism. Sexuality is one of them. So is gender, and so is race (Hennessy, 2000, p. 11).

The same understanding of primacy of class relations is also visible in Hennessy’s later work (Hennessy, 2014) and this brings it in line with Pollert’s suggestion that patriarchy can be deployed to describe male-dominance, when

used ‘adjectivally for particular, historical sets of relationships or institutions’ (Pollert, 1996, p. 654). It is in that sense that I also use patriarchy, in particular in my discussions of gender relations within the Roman Catholic Church in Poland.

To sum up, considering that the focus of my study is politics of sexuality in relation to processes of neoliberalization, a materialist feminist lens is one that enables me to hold these two together analytically in a meaningful way. At the same time other strands of knowledge become relevant for my investigations into the complex empirical sites that I examine in this project and it is to these I turn my attention next.

## **2.2 Neoliberalism and the self within**

While obscene greed and staggering unmet human need are most rampant, the knowledges required to translate this evidence into action for change seem less and less available. Indeed, it might even be said that the success of neoliberalism is directly related to the triumph of ways of knowing and forms of consciousness that obscure its enabling conditions (Hennessy, 2000, p. 78).

Considered a stage in capitalism’s history, neoliberalism and its accompanied processes – often referred to as neoliberalization – have accelerated the widening of the gap between the poor and the wealthy, to an unprecedented stage, when ‘eight *men* now own the same amount of wealth as the poorest half of the world’ (Oxfam International, 2017, p. 2; see also Piketty, 2014). On a most basic level, neoliberalism is a ‘theory of political economic practices’ grounded in the conviction that ‘human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills’, which in turn is best facilitated within an institutional framework characterized by free market, free trade and strong property rights (Harvey, 2007, p. 2). In addition, and not unrelatedly, the neoliberal logic calls for marketization of these spheres of public, and often also private, lives into which market has not yet expanded, with some of the most evident examples from recent decades being healthcare and education (Harvey, 2007). The role of the state is thus understood as limited to facilitating the operation of the market also by enabling its expansion into ever more areas of human activity (ibid.). In effect, neoliberalism has also been theorised as characterized by economization of political *and* social life (W. Brown, 1995; Rose, 1999b). This in turn is seen as a departure from an earlier

model, developed in the post-war period in the US and Western Europe defined by a more interventionist state form, that accepted responsibility for the welfare of its citizens and aimed at providing social security, economic growth, and employment (Harvey, 2007, pp. 10-13). Whilst the transition from one model to another did not happen overnight, the economic stagnation and global capital crises of the 1970s brought about pressures from the business elites to liberate corporate and business power (Harvey, 2007, p. 13). Effectively, neoliberalism became prominent in the 1980s – under the Reagan administration in the US and Thatcher's premiership in the UK – and importantly, as mentioned in the introduction, at the time when Poland's socialist regime was crumbling, and the elites were looking for an alternative way to order the economy and the society.

At the same time, whilst the invisible hand of the neoliberal market often passes as a force that is both neutral and fair, it has been repeatedly exposed as being neither and feminist critiques have repetitively called for demystification of neoliberalism. For the inherent inequalities that neoliberalism depends on, (S. Clarke, 2005; 2005) and the periodical crises that it produces, impact on people's lives in ways that are highly gendered, raced and classed. Most recently these critical debates have intensified as a response to the 2008 economic crisis (see for example Enloe, 2013; Fukuda-Parr, Heintz, & Seguino, 2013) and its disproportionate impact on working class women (Griffin, 2015; Ryan, 2017) and working class women of color in particular (for data on the UK see for example Women's Budget Group, 2016). Concurrently, the global financial system – exemplified by IMT, WTO and WB – has long been identified as a site that is highly gendered (Assassi, 2009; McDowell, 1997), associated with masculine subjectivities and one that represents the concentration of 'historical privilege in the hands of white men' (Griffin, 2015). In the context of Poland and the region as a whole, it has been highlighted that the transition to liberal market democracies, in addition to affecting the working classes disproportionately, was a process of masculinization that was disadvantageous to women on many levels including disproportionate loss of jobs in the process of economic restructuring (see for example Dunn, 2004; Einhorn, 1993; *Gender politics and post-communism : reflections from eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union*, 1993; Watson, 1993). What it also meant

in practice was that women were being pushed back into ‘traditional’ gender roles, in the words of Barbara Einhorn:

Since 1989, the demands of economic transformation in East Central Europe are serving to retrench women, displacing them from participation in the labor force and planting them squarely back in the family, their ‘primary sphere of responsibility’ (Einhorn, 1993, p. 5).<sup>19</sup>

Importantly, for Einhorn, gender is also a lens through which to view and assess the process of social change in the context of restructuring of the economy. Moreover, the quote above illustrates how capitalist market pressures collude with ideological, patriarchal and heterosexist understandings of women’s roles in society and how this in turn results in a clearly disadvantageous positioning of women in the new order; what it also points to is the necessity of gender sensitive analyses of capitalism. I find these insights instructive and gender is an important analytical category that I deploy in this study. At the same time and as signaled above, rather than pulling gender apart, I am interested in how it is intermeshed with differences of class, sexuality and location at the sites on which this study is focusing.

Additionally, whilst it is of course important to pay attention to the perhaps most obvious, quantifiable arenas and areas of neoliberalization and its role in the retreat of the state or the inequitable accumulation of capital globally and locally, in this study I combine these important insights with an investigation of how neoliberalism affects and shapes subjectivities. Whilst I return to the way in which the political economy of neoliberalization and in particular the expansion of the market into ever more spheres of life affects the Polish LGBT movement and politics of sexuality more generally in the final discussion in Chapter 8, what is also of interest here is neoliberalism’s expansion into the way individuals come to view themselves and others around them. To return to Wendy Larner’s (2000) observation, neoliberalism has been theorised in a range of ways: as a policy framework, an ideology or through the neo-Foucauldian lens of governmentality – for whilst ‘neoliberalism may mean

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<sup>19</sup> Of course this is not to say that the previous regime was characterised by gender equality, but rather that women under state socialism performed the dual duties as workers and mothers, with the reproductive labour in the family being largely devalued (Einhorn, 1993, pp. 6-7). At the same time, a gender pay gap existed that meant women were making between 66-75 per cent of men’s salary across all branches of the economy (ibid. p. 122).



less government, it does not follow that there is less governance' (Larner, 2000, p.12). Thus, neoliberalism 'is both a political discourse about the nature of rule and a set of practices that facilitate the governing of individuals from a distance' (Larner, 2000, p. 6). As such it lends itself, in my opinion to an integrative investigation such as mine that probes its different dimensions. Alongside the macro processes that neoliberal transformation effected on the Polish economy and society, it is also the ways in which, in Poland, neoliberal ideas and ideals have penetrated ways of thinking about and being in the world that this project aims to investigate and theorise.

Relatedly, according to Aihwa Ong (2006, p. 11) 'the main elements of neoliberalism as a political philosophy are' not only 'a claim that the market is better than the state at distributing public resources', but also 'a return to a primitive form of individualism'. Accordingly, it has been argued that the political and moral economy of neoliberalism promotes individual responsibility for 'health, wealth and welfare' (Stenning et al., 2010, p. 34) and that neoliberal subjects must therefore become entrepreneurs of the self (Ong, 2006). The understanding is thus that as the market expands and market logic enters into more and more spheres of people's lives, the way people come to think of themselves – and in effect also of their relations to others – is affected and transformed. One way this has been theorised is through theories of individualization, which indeed has been said to be 'neo-liberalism in action' (Lazzarato, 2009) and as such it deserves some attention and I return to this aspect in the following section of this chapter.

Finally, neoliberalism has become a problematic term for some as illustrated by John Clarke's (2008) provocative question 'what *isn't* neoliberal?' Clarke declares that neoliberalism 'has been stretched too far to be productive as a critical analytical tool'. He critiques neoliberalism on the basis of its 'promiscuity' or as he defines it 'hanging out with various theoretical perspectives'; Clarke also questions its 'omnipresence' that he feels makes some treat it as 'a universal or global phenomenon', and its 'omnipotence', whereby it becomes 'identified as the cause of a wide variety of social, political and economic changes' (J. Clarke, 2008, p. 135). To an extent I sympathize with the two latter points of Clarke's critique – but also fail to see how a multitude of theoretical attachments would make a concept less rather than

more useful. Yet, if neoliberalism is to be helpful as an analytical tool, it needs to be handled with care in a contextualized way and without totalizing gestures. I would argue that there is value in detailed empirical studies of neoliberalism as well as in thinking about the relationship between neoliberalism and subjectivity and it is these theoretical commitments that create space for this project. All this bearing in mind Larner's (2000, p. 12) observation that just as 'there are different configurations of neo-liberalism,' close investigation of particular neo-liberal projects 'is more likely to reveal a complex and hybrid political imaginary, rather than the straightforward implementation of a unified and coherent philosophy.'

### **2.2.1 Individualization**

The knowledges that promote... neoliberalism are varied and are generated from many social sites. They are most often identified with the advocacy of entrepreneurial initiative and individualism – in the form of self-help, volunteerism, or morality rooted in free will and personal responsibility (Hennessy, 2000, p. 78).

Zygmunt Bauman, Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens have championed the theory of individualization – with some important differences, as I will demonstrate below – arguing that in late modernity the individual is 'the basic unit of social reproduction' (Beck, 2001, p. xxii). Individualization can be understood as the way in which identity stops being a 'given' and becomes a 'task' for which individuals are urged to take responsibility (Bauman, 2000, p. 31) through engaging in 'day-to-day decisions on how to live' (Giddens, 1991, p. 14). At the core lies the idea that in late modernity individuals become more reflexive and thus individualized, as in the task of self-making they must 'leave no choice unturned' (Bauman, 2008, p. 69) and that this process is universal. For Bauman and Giddens, individualization presupposes the lessening significance of traditional collective modes of existence and classifications (such as for instance class and gender) and transformation of identity into 'musical chairs... which prompt women and men to be constantly on the move' (Bauman, 2000, p. 33). A condition under which, as Giddens puts it, 'we are not what we are, we are what we make of ourselves' (1991, p. 75). Such theories of what Matt Dawson (2012) refers to as 'disembedded individualization', have been met with

strong critiques from a range of scholars, who argue that reflexivity and by extension individualization are socially and culturally embedded and are also circumscribed by the boundaries of one's social reality (Michael Savage, 2000, p. 105; Skeggs, 2004). Admittedly, unlike Bauman and Giddens, Beck is much more attentive to the ways in which discourses of individualization obscure social constraints under which individuals operate. Beck argues that 'modernization dissolves the traditional parameters of industrial society: class, culture and consciousness, gender and family roles' and that 'these detraditionalizations happen in a social surge of individualization', yet, the relations of inequality remain stable (Beck, 1992, p. 87; emphasis in original). What diminishes are the forms of collective consciousness through which inequalities can be experienced as structural but not the actual effects of these inequalities. As a consequence, in neoliberal governance through individualization, social injustice, poverty, and inequality are constructed as detached from structural factors and cast as resulting from irresponsible self-management on an individual level (McNay, 2009, pp. 63-64) freeing the state from its obligations towards the most vulnerable of its citizens. The result is that responsibility for failure is shifted onto the individual whilst the systemic failures remain invisible. In the words of Beck: 'intensification and individualization of social inequality interlock' which results in systemic problems being lessened and 'transformed into personal failure' (Beck, 2000, p. 89).

These theoretical insights speak strongly to the *winner*s and *loser*s narrative, they are also of value for thinking through the ways in which Poland's transition from state socialism to a market democracy of the neoliberal kind involved more than just the reordering of the economy and the political system, but ultimately required also for the ideas of the self to be remade to fit and to serve the new order. If individualization is neoliberalism in action, then an intensive process of neoliberalization, such as the one that took place in Poland, is bound to foster an increased sense of individualization and rhetoric constructs such as the *winner*s and *loser*s of transformation can be regarded symptomatic of such shift.

Moreover, it could also be argued that in Poland, the promotion of neoliberal ideals and related ideas of the self is frequently contingent upon the

simultaneous rejection of socialist subjectivities, or a certain caricatured understanding of these, that constructs them as passive and dependent on the state in every sphere of life; subjectivities that are thus deemed incompatible with the challenges of the neoliberal market democracy (Stenning et al., 2010; Weiner, 2005). This idea is exemplified in the figure of the *homo sovieticus* characterized by:

moral relativism, learned passivity, helplessness, and the acceptance of state paternalism, the demand for egalitarian distribution as opposed to a merit-based system, blaming the system for personal failures and laying various claims at the foot of the state, as opposed to relying on oneself, an emphasis on security as opposed to a willingness to take risks (Ehl, 2013).

Interestingly, if we were to replace just about every trait in the above description by its opposite value, we would arrive at a pretty accurate formulation of a neoliberal individualized vision of a person, with self-management and independence at its core. Indeed, according to Stuart Shields, the process of transformation including the accession to the EU required the reconfiguration of *homo sovieticus* into not only 'homo oeconomicus but also homo neoliberal' (Shields, 2011, p. 93). This is important as it illustrates the particular temporal and geographical conditions that on the one hand limit the discursive scope for challenging the neoliberal ideas of the self by constructing it as an evolutionary step-up from the outdated and dysfunctional (supposedly, like the system that produced it) *homo sovieticus*, which also comes to stand for everything that was wrong with the previous regime. On the other hand through the construct of the *homo sovieticus* a disciplining discourse emerges that invalidates certain modes of being in the world and disqualifies any demands made by social groups that were 'less able' to 'adapt' to the new conditions. The narrative of *homo sovieticus* is a powerful one, but it is also a caricature, a construct that relies on overlooking the ways in which individuals engaged with the previous regime in ways other than passive dependency.<sup>20</sup> Still, by positioning reliance on the state as an outdated mode of being it warrants the retreat of that very state, lending legitimacy to the often-ruthless processes of

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<sup>20</sup> A good example that challenges this misconception is the explosion of private enterprises post 1989, or the prevalence of an informal economy under state socialism (Pawlik, 1991). Another example could be the ways in which Polish people adapted to the new conditions of market democracy using old strategies of 'cheating the system' (Morawska, 1999).

transition, which again has had a variable degree of negative consequences for people depending on how they are classed, gendered and located.

Relatedly, the trope of ‘adaptation’ that I signaled in the introduction is another way of rhetorically misplacing the causes and justifying the effects of marginalization of working-class communities and their spaces that followed neoliberalization. Most often located in what used to be the ‘key spaces’ of socialism, ‘in housing districts in old industrial cities and on former state farms’ (Stenning, 2005, p. 989) these communities came to stand for the very lack of initiative and entrepreneurial spirit required to thrive in the new conditions; blaming their inability to ‘adapt’ on their particular cultural traits (Stenning, 2005) both justifies the perpetuation of their exploitation and removes the responsibility for their situation from the state. As Stenning (2005, p. 990) points out, ‘in stark contrast to the official rhetoric of socialism, more common tropes today... are of the working class as useless, worthless and an obstacle to the ‘transition.’ Yet, such positioning of the working class is not exclusive to the Polish case, rather it reverberates the neoliberal agenda that devalues lives and ways of being in the world that undermine or expose its logic (see for example Skeggs & Loveday, 2012).

Consequently, ideas of the independent, active, entrepreneurial self prevail in Poland, and are reproduced across a multitude of sites. The classed and gendered character of such discursive formations is apparent when we return to Einhorn’s observation on the role of gender in the process of transition, and the particularly high cost thereof for women, or when we consider the ways in which the working class has been repositioned, as evidenced in the work of Stenning quoted above. While individuals were being urged to take control of their destiny, women were being pushed back into traditional family roles whilst their jobs were the first to go and the state retreated from providing free child-care, others were being constructed as lazy and passive at the same time as their livelihoods were being destroyed in the process of marketization, and privatization.

I return to the questions of individualization, entrepreneurial self and class in my analysis of the empirical sites under scrutiny here. At the same time, the tropes of self-management, hard work, discipline and individual accountability central to the neoliberal ideas of the self emerge particularly

strongly from RT participants' accounts. Analyzing RT offers an insight not only into how neoliberal notions of selfhood have infiltrated the ways in which people relate to themselves and others, but arguably also into the less often discussed harm done by the internalization of these notions. What I discuss next is the way in which the discourse of psycho-sciences and therapy colludes with this understanding of the self.

### **2.2.2 The self-governed, therapeutic self**

The therapeutic narrative of self-realization is widely pervasive because it is performed in a wide variety of social sites such as support groups, talk shows, counseling, rehabilitation programs, for-profit workshops, therapy sessions, the Internet: all are sites for the performance and retooling of the self. These sites have become invisible yet pervasive appendices to the ongoing work of having and performing a self... self-realization and its commodification has become a global enterprise (Illouz, 2007, pp. 48-49).

What informs much of the writing on the way self is theorised in relation to neoliberalism today is Michel Foucault's (1988) work on the self and governmentality. For Foucault, governmentality is a mode of rule that stands for the regimes and strategies aimed at directing the practices of 'free' individuals in their relations to each other (Foucault, 1988, pp. 19-20). Governmentality offers one way of thinking through ways in which neoliberal ordering of societies results in less government but not less governance, to return to the point made by Larner (2000).

Consequently, following Foucault, Louis McNay, argues that in neoliberal order social control operates through 'individualizing, disciplinary mechanisms that shape the behaviors and identity of the individual through the imposition of certain normalizing technologies or practices of the self' (2009, p. 57). Similarly, Michelle Brady (2007) points out that neo-liberal individualization results in flourishing of what Foucault referred to as 'techniques of the self', which he argued:

permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Foucault, 1988b, p. 18).

Moreover, it is as Foucault observed, the care of the self viewed through the prism of medical metaphors of health that encouraged the view of the self as

sick and in need of correction (Foucault, 1988a). The point I make in Chapter 6 is that RT is as such a technique of the self, aimed at correcting the ‘sick’ self. I argue that it is enacted through psycho-therapeutic self-governance, and very much in line with the neoliberal idea of personhood. I find the work of Nikolas Rose (1999, 2000) on the self-governance through psychotherapeutics and Eva Illouz’s (2007) intervention on emotional capitalism particularly suited to analyze the mechanisms at work in RT. Whilst the first one captures the allure of psychotherapeutics to the modern self, the second links them back to the logic of the market by illuminating the ways in which selfhood itself becomes commodified.

Generally speaking, Rose's work investigates how the psycho-sciences,<sup>21</sup> influence the ways in which we think of ourselves and of our lives. He argues that these sciences enable us to strive for autonomy and 'make it possible for all of us to make a project out of our biography', even if autonomy comes at a cost as its norm 'secretes, as inevitable accompaniment, a constant and intense self-scrutiny, a continual evaluation of our personal experiences, emotions and feelings in relation to images of satisfaction' (Rose, 1999a, p. 258). Rose argues that through the psychotherapeutics 'selves dissatisfied with who they are can engage in projects to refurbish and reshape themselves in the directions they desire' (ibid. p. 232); a point that is of particular relevance in relation to RT's project of ‘restoring’ of the heterosexual self. At the same time, for Rose, the self is not merely enabled to choose, it is obliged to do so (ibid. p. 231) whilst 'psychotherapeutics provide' it with the 'technologies of individuality' for its 'production and regulation' (ibid. p. 232). Thus, a noticeable contradiction emerges that Rose leaves unquestioned – individuals are constructed as free, but an obligation to choose and self-regulate is imposed on them.

Whilst Rose’s work is insightful in many ways, there are some issues with his insights on the way the self is made and re-made with the aid of psychotherapeutics and these reverberate the above-discussed misconceptions of individualization theorists, whereby the universalizing momentum of their work obscures the normative power of their theories. Describing the genesis, logic and allure of psychotherapeutic self-governance Rose extends it to

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<sup>21</sup> Or psychotherapeutics, as these terms are used by Rose almost interchangeably.

everyone, and thereby does not acknowledge how it might be classed, raced or otherwise marked with difference at any point in the process, from issues of financial access to ideas around discriminatory and harmful practices that perpetuate prejudice. Importantly, Illouz demonstrates that, access to psychological knowledge is not class neutral, and as such it has the potential to ‘stratify different forms of selfhood’ (2007, p. 71). In the sense that ‘emotions have become instruments of social stratification’ on the basis of ‘hierarchies of wellbeing understood as the capacity to achieve socially and historically situated forms of happiness and wellbeing’ (Illouz, 2007, p. 73) that remain more open to some than to others. Not acknowledging the classed dimension of psychotherapeutics, Rose also overlooks the materiality of the practices he discusses and for how availing of the psycho-sciences might be a domain of the relatively privileged. Yet, proliferation of various forms of psychological interventions and therapies witnessed from the second half of the twentieth century and onwards cannot be thought outside of the logic of commodification that enabled its spread as Illouz’s work demonstrates (2007; pp. 40-57). Work done by other scholars also points out that psychotherapeutic interventions can be loaded with other meanings, become a site of exploitation, and coercion.<sup>22</sup> In effect Rose’s work can be said to reproduce the idea of the rational, autonomous, self-driven individual as universal. Nevertheless, what Rose does achieve is to accurately capture the promise of psycho-sciences – which reverberates in the project of RT – even if it does not then investigate the moments in which they turn out to be empty, simply irrelevant, or directly harmful.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, and importantly for the purpose of my study, Rose argues that psycho-sciences are responsible for the proliferation of technologies of the self and whilst not explicitly mentioned, he demonstrates how these in turn are in line with the neoliberal ordering of the society and the self. He states:

Psychotherapeutics is linked at a profound level to the socio-political obligations of the modern self. The self it seeks to liberate or restore is the entity able to steer its individual path through life by means of the act of personal decision and the assumption of personal responsibility (Rose, 1999a, p. 258).

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<sup>23</sup> As when it is imposed on subjects, as for example through the penal system, see for instance McKim’s work (2008) on mandated community-based drug treatment programme.



There are couple of important points raised by Rose in the quote above that are directly of relevance to thinking through reparative therapy in Poland. Firstly, the very idea of reparative therapy rests on the assumption that there is a self – in this case assumed to be heterosexual – that needs restoring. Secondly, the responsibility for seeking out, implementing and undertaking the necessary corrective work is placed exclusively with the individual, reverberating the neoliberal mantra of self-made and self-governed individual. At the same time, the first aspect – the self in crisis – is symptomatic of what Illouz terms ‘emotional capitalism’, in which emotions ‘have become entities to be evaluated, inspected, discussed, bargained, quantified and commodified’ (2007, pp. 108-109). The resulting self is a ‘suffering one, ‘organized and defined by its psychic lacks and deficiencies’, which, crucially, is ‘incorporated back into the market through incessant injunctions to self-change and self-realization’ (Illouz, 2007, p. 109). It is these debates that inform my exploration of reparative therapy and I return to them in Chapter 6.

### **2.3 Sexuality and class in neoliberal times and spaces**

Marxist feminism is a valuable theoretical resource for understanding the history of sexuality and sexual identity because it is the most fully articulated effort to explain two of the social arrangements through which sexuality has historically been organized: patriarchal ideologies of difference, and class relations (Hennessy, 2000, p. 10).

Sexuality studies, having emerged from ‘predominantly culturalist frameworks’ (Jacobs & Klesse, 2014) have often been inattentive to matters of political economy and issues of class (with some notable exceptions that I return to below). This is despite the fact that after a level of retreat from class analysis in the last decades of the previous century (as signalled by amongst others Crompton, 2008; Skeggs, 1997), at least in the UK, class has remerged as a topic of interest for sociologists (McDermott, 2011; Reay, 2004, 2005; Mike Savage et al., 2013; Skeggs, 1997, 2004; Tyler, 2015). At the same time, thinking about class has moved away from conceptualizing it in purely economic terms, or as a position derived from one’s occupation (see for example Savage et al., 2013). Rather, drawing predominantly on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1987; 2010 (1979)), class came to be understood as

a position, or a location in social space, which is determined on the basis of the amount, and composition of, various types of capital possessed by an individual (these capitals are categorized as economic, cultural, social and symbolic).<sup>24</sup> Bourdieu was predominantly interested in how dominant groups in the society maintain their privileged position and he concluded that the way society is reproduced cannot be explained exclusively through economics, rather cultural knowledge and practices play a significant role in linking an individual to their place in the social hierarchy, these ideas were formulated in Bourdieu's most famous work *Distinction* first published in 1984 (Bourdieu, 2010, (1984). Bourdieu's work has been hugely influential also for the ways class has been thought about in relation to sexuality and whilst on the ground studies that examine this intersection are rare, there are some exceptions, such as the work done by Yvette Taylor (Taylor, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2009) who applies the lens of Bourdieu's work and his understanding of class as reproduced through culture to the lives of her working class lesbian subjects in the UK. Similarly, drawing on Bourdieu, Bev Skeggs' work on working class heterosexual women focuses on questions of culture and cultural (mis)representation (Skeggs, 1997, 2001). I have outlined my position on class in the introduction, but to reiterate, my understanding of class is based on materialist feminist framework that stresses the need to analyze class within a given mode of production and as an economic relationship between people within it.

But what is the value of considering class and sexuality as interrelated or even mutually constitutive? And what is at stake in reading class through the lens of culture? The answer to the first question has both an epistemological and a material dimension. Just as the below-discussed literature that critiques the commodification of LGBT lives and identities suggests, inattention to class reproduces assumptions about LGBT people as affluent, implicitly middle class consumers, making invisible and at times invalidating other configurations. Epistemologically, this is of significance for as Elizabeth McDermott (2011) observes: 'the marginalization of social class from sexualities research raises... questions about whose experiences are being used to generalize understandings of sexual and intimate life' (pp. 75–76). More importantly however, it matters

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<sup>24</sup> Importantly though, Bourdieu still acknowledges the relevance of occupation as an indicator of position in social space (1987, p. 4).

also because ‘class resources and advantages are likely to be crucial to negotiating and claiming... equal lives’ within the neoliberal framework (McDermott, 2011, p. 64). If we come to see class as central to claiming equality then its influence on sexuality and related politics in neoliberal times and spaces becomes evident. To omit class from our analysis is thus, to obscure its power. However, if class is central to studying sexuality, which I believe it is – is it best understood through ideas of cultural capital and its cultural reproduction? My understanding is that whilst cultural reproduction is an important site of class struggles and class identities, focusing exclusively on culture risks masking the extent to which class operates structurally. It is here that the materialist feminist work of Rosemary Hennessy becomes a valuable resource.

Hennessy’s materialist feminist approach to sexuality is based on its understanding as ‘a historical discourse that draws upon gender and race in producing social subjects, embodied subjectivities and political standpoints’ (Hennessy, 2014, p. 322). But equally importantly, from a materialist feminist perspective, sexuality must be read in relation to the social arrangements through which it has been historically organized: class relations and patriarchy (Hennessy, 2000). There is thus an urgent need to reed sexuality in relation to political economy; in the words of Hennessy:

Because it is the social order – the division of labor, distribution of wealth, resources, and power – that is at stake in the struggle over meanings, a politics that contests the prevailing constructions of sexual identity and that aims to disrupt the regimes they support will need to address more than discourse (Hennessy, 2000, p. 120).

As already noted, this does not however mean that discourse and culture should be discarded as valid sites for analysis, rather the focus is on bringing capitalism in more firmly into knowledges of sexuality. Hennessy’s work, whilst critical of the strands of knowledge that overlook the ways culture and capitalism are linked, invites us to hold both together for analysis. She writes:

The enormous outpouring of academic work in cultural studies over the past two decades has... been characterized by a distinct and emphatic erasure of capitalist economy from its knowledges, more specifically an erasure of the historical links between culture and capitalism (Hennessy, 2000, p. 81).

One of the ways in which this erasure has been operationalized, according to Hennessy, is *precisely* through ‘suppression of class analysis’ (2000, p. 139), or focusing on discourse and culture exclusively to the detriment of the material struggles and inequalities. This is relevant, as it is also consequential for how class is theorised, for whilst it could be argued (returning to the work done on sexuality and class) that reading class as culture might not necessarily fall under the category of fully suppressing class analysis, it is also plausible that doing so might serve to mystify the material reality of class and its role within the inequitable distribution of resources in neoliberal capitalism. To do the opposite would thus require us to bring class back into the spotlight and investigate the ways in which it is reproduced through culture in conjunction with its structural mechanisms. The validity of such approach becomes palpable if we return for a moment to the ways in which the narratives of *homo sovieticus*, or ‘adaptability’, mobilize cultural understandings of working class, or if we examine the ways in which culture was deployed to legitimize gender unequal outcomes of the transition – pointing at a particular collusion of capitalism and patriarchal gender relations. To treat class as culture simply misses the point.

Correspondingly, Hennessy argues that ‘the history of sexual identity... has been fundamentally, though never simply, affected by several aspects of capitalism: wage labor, commodity production and consumption’ (2000, p. 4). Yet, as she also argues the relationship between sexual identities and capitalism remains understudied and undertheorised (*ibid.*). This is despite the fact that ‘for those of us caught up in the circuits of late capitalist consumption, the visibility of sexual identity is often a matter of commodification’ which itself is ‘a process that invariably depends on the lives and labor of invisible others’ (Hennessy, 2000, p. 111). On one hand, the below discussed literature on homonormativity, which dates later than Hennessy’s *Profit and pleasure* might be seen as responding to that knowledge gap. On the other hand the spiked interest in culture did not erase other scholarly lines of inquiry and some earlier examples exist that suggest that the interest in the way capitalism bears on sexuality has in fact been continuous. As early as in 1983 John D’Emilio suggested that the emergence of new sexual identities was linked to capital in profound ways when he wrote:

The expansion of capital and the spread of wage labor effected a profound transformation in the structures and functions of nuclear family, the ideology of family life, and the meaning of heterosexual relations. It is these changes in the family that are most linked to the appearance of collective gay life (D'Emilio, 1983, p. 102).

Since then other scholars have pointed to the centrality of commodity consumption to the emergence of gay and lesbian identities (see for example Chauncey, 1994; D'Emilio & Freedman, 2012; Weeks, 1999). Whilst more recently the commodification of LGBTQ spaces (Binnie & Skeggs, 2004; Boyd, 2011; M. Hunt & Zacharias, 2008; Puar, 2002; Rushbrook, 2002) identities (Guidotto, 2006; Lacy, 2014; Peters, 2011) and lifestyles (Hughes, 2003; Puar, 2002; Ragusa, 2005) have been explored. As Alan Sears puts it:

The penetration of the market deeper into everyday life has created spaces for commodified forms of lesbian and gay existence, oriented around bars, restaurants, commercial publications, fashions and hairstyles. Capitalism has accommodated elements of lesbian and gay existence in the face of ongoing mobilizations, opening certain spaces for lesbian and gay life while at the same time shutting down others (Sears, 2005, p. 92).

Thus an ever-growing body of literature investigates the varied collusions with and cooptation of sexual identities into the market. Frequently these investigations deliver sharp critiques of the effects of such commodified and commodifying way of thinking about LGBT lives and identities drawing attention to the classed, gendered and raced character of these processes. As already noted, a range of scholars have critiqued the way LGBTQ people are constructed as middle class, affluent consumers (Hollibaugh & Weiss, 2015; Sears, 2005; Woltersdorff, 2007). Indicating the fundamentally exclusionary nature of such constructs scholars such as Sears argue that

In the context of commodification, a person becomes visible as “queer” only through the deployment of particular market goods and services. Others are invisible, either because they are literally left outside the door (for example, because they cannot afford the cover charge) or because they cannot look “gay” or “lesbian” if they are old, fat, skinny, transgendered, racialized, stigmatized as disabled or ill, or obviously poor (Sears, 2005, p. 108).

Following a similar line of critique, Volker Woltersdorff (2007) writes that ‘sexuality is now figuring as an individual consumer choice at the free market of lifestyles’ resulting in a ‘consumerist perspective’ which in turn ‘creates a strong bias for the white male middle class experience’ (p. 4). Here, it is easy to

see how such ‘individual consumer choice’ reflects and reinforces the neoliberal ideas of personhood discussed above, once again bringing into relief its classed, gendered and raced limits. Moreover, Amber Hollibaugh’s and Margot Weiss’ (2015) US-based work points out how ‘LGBT people are typically depicted as affluent consumers with high disposable incomes’ despite the fact that this is far from being the norm (p. 19). For as they argue, ‘the majority of LGBT/Q people are poor or working class, female, and people of color, who struggle to get a job... to pay their rent and care for themselves and the people they love’ (Hollibaugh & Weiss, 2015, p. 19).

These critiques are linked explicitly to the critique of neoliberalism and its injustices and the heightened risks of economic exclusion associated with being LGBT or queer (Hollibaugh & Weiss, 2015); for ‘while precariousness in neoliberalism increases for all, queer people or hybrid identities are more exposed to precariousness than others’ (Woltersdorff, 2008/2009, p. 7).<sup>25</sup> This body of work is of relevance as it points to the need for thinking about sexuality and class together and in relation to the processes of neoliberalization. On a theoretical level this would not only address the gaps and omissions that exist in the literature on sexuality, but also in the one that speaks of class. Whilst in this study I build on this literature, in particular in relation to the insights it offers on the classing of LGBT lives and identities, I also go beyond it by widening the lens of commodification to include anti-LGBT practices such as RT.

Moreover, considering the relationship between neoliberalism and homophobia, Woltersdorff writes that ‘homosexuality seems to be a kind of luxury that only wealthy people can afford’ and what follows is a ‘political discourse’ that ‘draws the image of people getting the straighter the poorer they are’ (2007; p. 5). Here I am interested in the extent to which a similar dynamic might be at work in conceptualizations that conflate homosexuality with middle class, urban, secular, educated subjectivities whilst locating homophobia in

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<sup>25</sup> Whilst academic work that would address these issues is yet to materialise in the context of Poland, the scarce non-academic sources that exist suggest that there is a very real and often quantifiable dimension to LGBT lives in contemporary Poland (with high ‘costs’ of inequality (*Sytuacja społeczna osób LGBT. Raport za lata 2010 i 2011*, 2012) and in particular people who identify as transgender literally bear the cost of otherness by being significantly more likely to be unemployed and/or receive *renta* (disability/illness benefit)(Sielicki, 2014).

spaces that are predominantly working class and/or rural. Again, such erasures and omissions rely heavily on particular constructs of LGBT lives and attitudes to them and I investigate how these are embedded in material conditions of Polish postsocialist context with its polarized and unequal distribution of the benefits of the transition, as I will argue in the succeeding chapters.

At the same time, as discussed in Chapter 1, investigating class in Poland is not an easy task and scholarly analyses that engage with questions of class are rare. Direct analyses of the ways sexuality and class might intersect and link to neoliberalism are even harder to come by and in that sense this project addresses an existing research gap. Nevertheless, some work has been done mainly in relation to the conflicts around sexual politics that John Binnie (2014) links to the ‘material dimension... connected to conflicts in Polish society engendered by practices of neoliberalization’ (p. 247). Similarly, the topic has been approached through analyses of the specific politics of displacement of material struggles ‘onto public symbolic confrontations’ (Kalb, 2009, p. 218) over sexual politics and LGBT rights issues – exemplified starkly by the homophobic politics around the equality marches, which I discuss in detail in Chapter 3. The results of such displacement came to be visible in, amongst others, the ways in which the EU came to signify moral corruption and decadence embodied in the figure of a cosmopolitan gay, in stark opposition to Polish ‘traditional values’, as fashioned by PiS and other right wing actors. At the same time, the fact that the controversial 2000s’ equality marches were openly supported by the EU and partially staffed by Western European LGBT activists and politicians (Binnie & Klesse, 2013; Gruszczynska, 2009) heightened the sense of social cleavages between their participants and supporters, and participants of the counterdemonstrations. The class dimension of these mobilizations remains largely overlooked despite a significant number of publications on the topic of the marches (see Chapter 3 for an overview). Here again Don Kalb’s work is an exception (2009). Kalb writes:

Of course, a clash of class surrounds... events such as gay parades. From the point of view of postsocialist industrial workers, who had lost control over their factories and communities, had barely saved their skins in the collapse of their industries, and had been confined to a life of hard work and material stagnation in

a hostile public environment that openly fetishized consumption, they appeared as rituals extolling the pleasure of licentious, free-choice consumerism (Kalb, 2009a; p. 217)

Kalb's take on the much-discussed events is valuable, if rare,<sup>26</sup> inasmuch that it attempts to theorize certain public displays of homophobia as a response to the conditions of dispossession as experienced by the working classes in postsocialism whilst also pointing to the commodification of LGBT identities through the colorful and flamboyant (in contrast to the material dimension of the working class spaces and lives) event of the parade. Even though Kalb does not deal with questions of sexuality in relation to class explicitly his work offers an important insight into the ways these two categories have come into contestation in the public sphere in postsocialist Poland. Here again, his focus on 'clash of class' stands in contrast to the many analyses of the events that retell the story as a clash of culture – traditional, religious, implicitly backwards vs. liberal, secular and progressive – (see for instance Shibata, 2009;<sup>27</sup> Holzhaecker, 2013, O'Dwyer, 2008) detaching them from the material conditions in which they are produced, lived and circulated. What Kalb's work does well is to point out how anxieties around very real material conditions and changes embedded in classed reality are displaced onto attitudes towards LGBT people. However, what his work does not engage with is the erasures that follow from the resulting divisions and how those make certain experiences, may it be on the basis of people's class, their rural location, or the combination of both. I return to these issues in Chapter 7.

Furthermore, the diversity of geographies of sexualities has long been acknowledged and geographers have examined the spatiality of both recognition and reproduction of LGBTQ as categories, identities and lived experiences (D. Bell & Valentine, 1995; Browne, 2011; Browne, Lim, & Brown, 2007; Oswin, 2008; Taylor, 2008; Weston, 1995). This body of work maps out the

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<sup>26</sup> Agnieszka Graff (2010) is amongst the few other scholars who have suggested that conservative discourses around sexuality in Poland (in particular around the time of the EU accession) have served as a means of resolving anxieties related to the processes of transformation; Graff does not however look at the class aspect of this dynamic.

<sup>27</sup> Shibata's article is a particularly good example of a vision of contemporary Poland that suffers from a lack of analytical nuance, as the author 'explains' the cultural and historical roots of homophobia in nationalism she moves from one generalization to another whilst she extends the views of the ultra Catholic League of Polish Families onto the entire nation: 'Today most Polish citizens are affected by the homophobic state of mind' (Shibata, 2009; p. 256).



complicated relationship between sexualities and space, contributing to a reading where ‘sexual differences are read as both recreating space and being reformed through the codes and norms of place’ (Browne, 2011, p. 105). Moreover, scholars also point out the links that exist between that that is urban and the process of LGBT identity formation (Gray, 2009; Halberstam, 2005; Weston, 1995). At the same time, in the context of Poland there is a striking lack of scholarship that engages with questions of sexuality and spatiality, with two notable exceptions: a report that examines the particular positionality of rural lesbians (Fundacja Przestrzeń Kobiet, 2015) and Binnie and Klesse’s article (2013) that offers an examination of LGBT activists’ discourses on transnational migration and homophobia. Yet, as I investigate in Chapters 7 and 8 both class and location inflect the ways in which sexuality is lived, even if these inflections are less linear than it is frequently assumed. Thus, this project offers an insight into how these issues – of location and sexuality – are negotiated in contemporary post-socialist Poland, addressing an existing research gap in the literature on the Polish LGBT movement as well as the broader politics of sexuality under neoliberalism.

Last, but not least, politics of sexuality that are fostered under the neoliberal conditions have been theorised through the lens of homonormativity and it is to this body of literature that I turn my attention next.

### **2.3.1 Homonormativity**

[L]imited assimilation of gays into mainstream middle-class culture does not disrupt postmodern patriarchy and its intersection with capitalism; indeed, it is in some ways quite integral to it (Hennessy, 2000, p. 105).

In the quote above Hennessy points to the way in which under capitalism (limited) sexual difference is assimilated without this accommodation having any detrimental effects on the patriarchal ordering of the society. Hennessy’s (2000, pp. 105-106) argument, which I find rather convincing, is that the fact that capitalism has made use of heteronormativity does not necessarily mean that heteronormativity is required for its survival. In fact, she argues, sexuality is largely irrelevant as long as the fundamental inequality of the system remains unchallenged and someone is there to carry the unequal burden of reproductive and care labor. She writes:

Capitalism does not require heteronormative families or even a gendered division of labor. What it does require is an *unequal* division of labor. If gay or queer-identified people are willing to shore up that unequal division – whether that means running corporations or feeding families, raising children or caring for the elderly – capital will accept us (Hennessy, 2000, p. 105; emphasis added).

Seen from this angle, the rise of homonormative politics as described below demonstrates the capacity of capitalism to absorb and – as the commodification of sexual identities literature suggests – to profit from a limited range of sexual difference whilst at the same time pointing to the limits of this kind of politics and its inability to bring about radical change or even pose a challenge to capitalism's exploitative logic. Consequently, theorizations of homonormativity have emphasized the ways in which it colludes with neoliberal understandings of the society and the individual, whilst reinforcing rather than challenging patriarchal gendered norms (G. Brown, 2009, 2012; Browne & Bakshi, 2011; Duggan, 2003; Richardson, 2004, 2005). Thus, for Lisa Duggan – whose work *'Twilight of Equality'* offers one of the most comprehensive theorizations of homonormativity – homonormativity is:

a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption (Duggan, 2003, p. 179).

Moreover, and relatedly, homonormativity is a tool that enables us to see how sexual politics link to capitalist materiality, as it denotes a 'construction of social norms that include lesbians and gay men on the condition that they conform to individualist and consumerist economic values and lead sexual lives that mirror the norms of heteronormativity' (Browne & Bakshi, 2011, p. 181). Indeed, in the West, the homonormative turn, associated with the neoliberal order – which, to recap, became prominent from 1980s onwards – has been considered to be a departure from the previous era of radical politics of the 1960s, insomuch as

liberationist attacks on constructions of sexual and gender 'abnormality' were not associated with seeking to be 'normalized' through incorporation into the dominant culture. These social movements were highly critical of 'mainstream society', and contested many core institutions and cultural values in fundamental ways (Richardson, 2004, p. 395).

This point is of relevance, if we consider that due to historical circumstances none of this actually happened in Poland, no equivalent of the women's and gay liberation movements developed – and it is not until the 1980s that a Polish LG movement first emerged, despite some earlier small scale attempts at organizing (Szulc, 2017). Consequently, almost the entire history of the Polish LGBT movement is framed by, and to an extent also largely enabled by, the move to capitalism. This might at least partially explain the homonormative impulses of the Polish LGBT movement.

At the same time, I agree with Brown when he warns us of thinking through homonormativity 'as uniform and all-encompassing', as to do so would mean that we 'run the risk of losing any sense of the geographic specificity of these social, political, and economic changes' and 'overlook how these processes and practices are experienced unevenly and in very different ways depending on their spatial context' (G. Brown, 2009, p. 1498). Thus, homonormativity as an analytical concept is only useful insofar as it is considered in its historical and geographical situatedness and in relation to the specifically situated formation of capitalism and patriarchy through which it is generated. And as I examine in Chapter 5, in the case of Christian LGBT organizing in Poland, homonormative ideas are 'locally' generated to meet the existing constraints, in the case in question, the Catholic ideals of monogamous coupledness. Yet, what remains unchanged is the way in which homonormativity is folded into, and reinforces, the logic of neoliberalism.

In addition and significantly, it has been argued that in certain contexts gays and lesbians are now expected to assume the roles of responsible members of the society,

to adopt disciplined sexual practices through the internalization of new norms of identity and sexual practices associated with a certain (heteronormative) lifestyle, with various rights granted through demonstrating a specific form of "domestic" sexual coupledness' (Richardson, 2005, p. 521).

If we consider that at least in the West homonormativity is linked to increased normalization and inclusion of lesbians and gays as respectable citizens, through granting of certain rights, in the context of neoliberal market democracy, then the usefulness of the concept might appear at least partially

limited in the case of Poland, where no legal gains were made in introducing solutions such as same sex partnerships or rights for gay and lesbian couples to adopt children. Nevertheless, the concept is of relevance to studying LGBT sexualities in Poland, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 5. What follows is interesting inasmuch that on a theoretical level it suggests that homonormativity can become dominant *regardless* of legal recognition and state support. The consequences of such a configuration are in my opinion as fascinating as they are worrying. As much as the erasure of difference homonormativity effectively relies on furthers the cause of assimilation, and might eventually lead to recognition (legal and otherwise) it does so for a very small fraction of the population already positioned to benefit from it, and at an arguably very high cost, consolidating the heteronorm but also restricting other ways of doing sexual politics and living LGBT lives.

Finally, the case of Poland is a noteworthy example that demonstrates that homonormativity ‘works’, when other ways of thinking about LGBT politics – as reliant on the state as a source of recognition – do not apply; this is true for instance for homonationalism as theorized by Jasbir Puar (Puar, 2006, 2013). For Puar (2013, p. 336), homonationalism is a way to conceptualize the way in which acceptance of gay and lesbian subjects has ‘become a barometer by which the right to and capacity for national sovereignty is evaluated’ and an analytical tool to understand ‘how and why a nation’s status as “gay-friendly” has become desirable in the first place.’ In a context where the said ‘nation’ has repeatedly refused to legitimize same sex unions, or indeed where its factions have mobilized homophobia politically to differentiate itself from the West – as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 – the limits of homonationalism as a framework become apparent.

#### **2.4. Concluding remarks**

Considering that Poland’s transition from state socialism was initiated at the time when neoliberalism was at its prime, the enchantment with neoliberal ideas came to bear heavily on the shape of the transformation and its cost for the Polish people. Equally importantly, and as I will examine in the following chapters of this thesis, it also came to bear heavily on the ways in which

selfhood is understood and narrated, and politics of sexuality are enacted, and affected by processes of commodification and marketization. In this chapter I have mapped out the theoretical landscape from which the analysis of the empirical sites this project examines develops. In a bid to say something meaningful about the ways in which sexual politics are fashioned under conditions of neoliberalization in contemporary Poland I bring together sets of literatures that are frequently considered as separate. This move is contingent upon the idea that class, gender, and sexuality are mutually constituted in space and time and informed by materialist feminist commitment to analyzing capitalism and gender relations in their locality and time specific incarnations.

In this chapter I have reviewed the relevant work that has been done on neoliberalism, individualization, sexuality and class, and sexuality and location. This study aims to build on, but also make contributions to, each of these strands of knowledge offering new insights from the empirical sites it investigates. However, since sexuality, class, gender, and location are axes of difference – and inequality – that are rarely put together, this project opens up a space for thinking these relationally by investigating the way they are intermeshed and the complex exchanges between them. Whilst the various sets of literatures discussed above guide my study and theoretically illuminate its different analytical parts, I also identify crucial gaps in them, which this project addresses. Thus, whilst the effects of neoliberalization on the politics of sexuality have been to some extent investigated in other locations, studies that focus on these issues in postsocialist contexts are yet to materialize. Similarly, the ways in which these processes are classed, gendered, and localized in contemporary Poland remain understudied. Moreover, there is a large body of knowledge that discusses homonormative politics, yet it often does so from the position in which limited legal and state support has been granted to LGBT people. However, investigating homonormative impulses in locations where no such state support exists adds a new dimension to our understanding of the effects of capitalism on politics of sexuality. Moreover, paying attention to locally specific collusions of neoliberalization with patriarchal gender regimes we are better placed to understand both the larger processes that sustain such collusions and the individual narratives of people who live the injustices these produce. Taking an integrative analytical approach to make sense of the

processes and empirical sites under investigation in this study I aim to intervene in the literatures I have discussed above and hopefully offer a different lens through which politics of sexuality can be studied in Poland, but arguably also in other spaces.

## Chapter 3: Polish LGBT movement and Reparative Therapy in Context

### 3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to contextualize my study and to provide an overview of both Reparative Therapy (RT), as a phenomenon with a particular history and prevalence, and the broadly understood LGBT politics in Poland. Consequently, the chapter is divided into two parts that deal with these two separate contexts, required to ‘make sense’ of RT in Poland and also to engage with the research questions this project sets out to address.

To reiterate a point made in the introduction to this thesis, it is important to note that the situation of LGBT<sup>28</sup> persons and the emergence and development of the LGBT movement in Poland cannot be separated from the dramatic changes that occurred in the country over the last three decades. Beginning in the early 1980s when the political climate began to slowly change, throughout the collapse of state socialism, with the subsequent shock therapy, which involved simultaneous and profound economic and political reform<sup>29</sup>, into the first decades of democracy and joining the EU new opportunities and new challenges emerged that a) shaped the character of the debate around homosexuality and LGBT politics and b) redefined the scope of possibility for political and social action, and for LGBT organizing. In what follows I give an overview of the history of LGBT mobilization and organization in Poland – and when relevant also of resistance to it – both pre and post the fall of state socialism in 1989, focusing on the key issues and events. The aim is to situate the movement in the wider historical context and also to account for its particular temporality, which even though influenced by ‘Western’ ideas and

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<sup>28</sup> I use LGBT here to refer to the movement in general, also because it is the acronym used by Polish organizations devoted to promoting the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans people; at the same time I try to avoid using LGBT as an empty signifier, in particular when discussing the situation of sexual minorities under the socialist regime, when the discussion was mainly focused on homosexual men, with the odd mention of lesbians.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Shock therapy’ refers to a dramatic, overnight change that set the Polish social and economic system into turmoil. It included: ‘immediate price liberalization, immediate privatization, immediate establishment of an independent central bank, immediate achievement of a balanced budget, immediate introduction of free trade and immediate establishment of a fully convertible flexible currency’ (2011). It resulted in a skyrocketing inflation rates, sudden increases in unemployment, and declines in real incomes (Marangos, 2005, p. 71).

concepts (as visible for example in the language used to discuss LGBT issues<sup>30</sup>), developed as a ‘mixture of ideologies, politics, themes, tactics and aesthetics’ indebted to very distinct processes and histories (Binnie & Klesse, 2012, p. 451). The first part of this chapter is devoted to this task, I then move on to contextualizing RT. As discussed in the introduction (Chapter 1), there are currently three Catholic organizations devoted to reparative therapy in Poland. To recap, these are: *Odwaga* (Courage), *Pomoc 2002* (Help 2002), and *Pascha* (Passover). Notably, *Odwaga* is a part of one of the largest and oldest Catholic organizations in Poland, *Ruch Światło-Życie* (Light-Life Movement). These organizations offer a variety of services such as support/prayer groups, therapy sessions, seminars, meetings, as well as weekend workshops; all aimed to help with what they refer to as ‘unwanted’ same-sex attraction. RT in the form that I am concerned with in this study, is new in the Polish context and it has been introduced through promotional activities of US organizations and individuals seeking new markets for their version of truth about homosexuality. Consequently, providing background to RT, I choose to focus exclusively on the US context when discussing its origins, and evolution, precisely because of this link, both theoretical and practical, between RT in the US and in Poland.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the second part of this chapter gives a brief historical overview of RT, discusses the key figures and events, as well as providing information on the challenges to RT and consequent responses to these. I end the second part of this chapter with a short examination of the global dimension of RT followed by a brief conclusion.

## **3.2 Situation of LGBT persons and the LGBT movement in Poland**

### **3.2.1 Gays and lesbians under the socialist regime**

Surveillance and coercive action against gay men in Poland paralleled other efforts in Eastern Europe to politicize and open to state interference aspects of

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<sup>30</sup> Words such as *gej* and *lesbijka* are used commonly, and so is the phrase ‘*coming out*’; for a detailed discussion on the ways in which homosexuality is talked about in the Polish language see Rodzoch-Malek (2012).

<sup>31</sup> This is not to say that the US is the only place that ‘exports’ RT, for instance the Dutch psychologist Gerard van den Aardweg is amongst the authors whose work is advertised in by the Polish RT groups. However, to return to the market metaphor, it is the US that remains the biggest ‘producer’ of RT-related theory.



gender and sexuality. Decriminalization and recriminalization of same-sex relations served various renditions of the revolutionary goals posited by Bolshevism, Stalinism and post-Stalinism... and the “myth of universal heterosexuality and patriotic sexual restraint” in the late Soviet period suggested that to be “queer” meant that one was not a patriot (Owczarzak, 2009, p. 423).

In Poland, homosexuality was removed from the list of legal offences in 1932 (Kochanowski, 2007-2008, p. 147). After the Second World War, Poland did not re-criminalize homosexuality, despite the fact that such a strategy was followed by the Soviet Union (Gruszczyńska, 2009b, p. 19). At the same time, sexual minorities remained largely invisible under the socialist regime and according to Gruszczyńska:

Throughout the communist period debates regarding sexuality in Eastern Europe, including Poland, were largely silenced... The only areas where homosexuality did appear were research in criminology and psychiatry, with homosexuality treated as social pathology and deviation (Gruszczyńska, 2009b, p. 21).

Thus, in practice, under the socially conservative socialist regime (which unraveled in Poland in 1989) homosexuality was treated as a social taboo; it was rarely addressed or discussed in public and gays faced discrimination and at times direct state persecution. On the other hand, when homosexuality was discussed officially it was in terms of depravity and disease and gay subculture was regarded as decadent, crime-inducing and deviant (Kochanowski, 2007-2008; Owczarzak, 2009). According to Kochanowski (2007-2008), the conservatism of the regime – which he compares to that of Franco’s rule in Spain – is to be blamed for the fact that the countercultural revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s did not occur in Poland, and by extension no LG rights movement emerged until the final decade of the regime. Indeed, some scholars have noted that instead of the civil rights and sexual liberation movement the Polish society was engaged in an ongoing struggle against the socialist state (Fischer, 2007). At the same time homosexuality was perceived as something external to the socialist reality and to the official state ideology, homosexuality represented ‘a symptom of Western depravity’ as it did not fit the officially presented socialist morality. As a result the government tried to create an impression that homosexuality simply did not exist under state socialism

(Klischczynski, 2001, p. 161).<sup>32</sup> Still, as new work by scholars such as Lukasz Szulc (2017) demonstrates, the early stages of LG organizing in Poland can be traced back to 1980s and small scale publications of two magazines devoted to gay and lesbian issues and lifestyles that were printed underground by a group of individuals with ties to Western Europe.

Nevertheless, it was not until the final decades of socialism that some slow signs of change could be noted in the public sphere, with attempts being made to bring the question of homosexuality into the public discourse. The very first article in Polish print press discussing homosexuality was published in *Życie Literackie* (Literary Life) in 1974 (Górska, 2005). In 1981 an important Polish weekly, *Polityka* (Politics), published an article discussing the negative attitude of Poles towards homosexuality and the inconspicuous gay subculture in Warsaw (Klischczynski, 2001; Selerowicz, 1994). Four years later *Polityka* once again brought up the subject of homosexuality in an article entitled ‘We are different’, which as Klischczynski notes was dissimilar in its tone and content to the prevailing – at the time – ‘sensationalist or medical scientific reports on homosexuality’ (Klischczynski, 2001, p. 162). The first TV debate on the issue of homosexuality took place in 1984 and around the same time the newspaper *Kurier Polski* (Polish Courier) and magazine *Relaks* (Relax) began to publish personal adds from gays and lesbians (Górska, 2005). Also in the 1980s, certain bars and cafés in Warsaw became unofficial meeting points for gay people.

Such increased visibility, however limited, did not escape the attention of the authorities and it was met with a backlash of persecutory measures of which *Akcja Hiacynt* (Hyacinth Action) was the most prominent example. In this now infamous operation that started in November 1985, initiated by the then Minister of Home Affairs, Czesław Kiszczak, functionaries of the Citizens’ Militia entered into schools, universities, and workplaces across the country and took men suspected of being gay to police headquarters. There, for each man detained a file called *Karta Homoseksualisty* (Card of the Homosexual) was made that included fingerprints and photographs. Under the threat of having their sexual orientation made public, the men were questioned about their sexual

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<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, in the 2000s it was not unusual for right wing conservative actors in Polish politics to point out that homosexuality is closely linked to the degenerate socialist regime (Owczarzak, 2009).

contacts, forced to sign declarations about their sexual activities, and at times forced into cooperating with the secret police (Górska, 2005; Owczarzak, 2009).<sup>33</sup> The operation targeted exclusively men and during the three years (1985-1987) when it took place more than 11,000 gays were registered (Górska, 2005). Organizers of the Hyacinth Action used HIV/AIDS prevention, the need to identify the criminal community, and the fight against prostitution as pretexts for this operation (Kliszczynski, 2001; Kochanowski, 2007-2008; Owczarzak, 2009). The files, known as the ‘pink records’, were developed and kept until 1988 (Górska, 2005; Kochanowski, 2007-2008).

The intensification of state sponsored harassment in the 1980s and the advent of the HIV/AIDS epidemic were the conditions under which the Polish LG movement emerged. It was also in the 1980s that the above mentioned first Polish LG magazines were published; in 1986 the first *Filo Express*<sup>34</sup> went to print, a year later the short-lived *Efebos* came out for the first time (Górska, 2005).<sup>35</sup> Finally, the very first Polish LG organization, *Warszawki Ruch Homoseksualny* (WRH) (Warsaw Homosexual Movement) was established in 1987; it operated outside of the legal framework as the authorities declined its registration application on the grounds that it offended the public morality (Kochanowski, 2007-2008). Despite the lack of legal recognition on a national level, in 1988 WRH joined ILGA and contributed to the first international conference of LG activists in Poland. Around the same time more local groups emerged in other cities in Poland, which joined WRH and created *Stowarzyszenie Lambda* (Association Lambda) in 1989, which became the first officially registered LG organization in Poland (Kochanowski, 2007-2008).

### **3.2.2 HIV/AIDS epidemic and the emerging LG movement in Poland in 1980s and 1990s**

The framing of homosexuality in the public discourse was marked by two features: lack of political salience and the discourse of HIV/AIDS. Regarding

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<sup>33</sup> The forced confessions read: ‘I herby pronounce that I have been homosexual since birth. During the course of my life I have had multiple sexual partners, all of them have been adults. I am not interested in minors’ (Górska, 2005).

<sup>34</sup> It was later renamed *Facet* (Guy).

<sup>35</sup> It took another couple of years, and a regime change, before gay and lesbian press became widely available in Polish newsagents, of which *Ruch* kiosks are the most prominent example; magazine *Inaczej* (Differently/Otherwise) went on sale in *Ruch* in 1990 followed by a monthly-occurring *Filo* later that year (Górska, 2005).

salience, homosexuality was simply not a political topic for most of the 1990s. Social taboo prevented open discussion (O'Dwyer, 2012, p. 340; emphasis removed).

The HIV/AIDS epidemic reached Poland at the time when the socialist regime was slowly disintegrating. Faced with a growing dissatisfaction with the government, amplified by shortages of food and consumer goods the country was heading towards change, with the Solidarity movement gaining impetus and successfully challenging the authority of the socialist government (Ost, 1990; Wedel, 1986). At the same time, LG organizing was in its very early and very much informal stage when the first case of AIDS was registered in Poland in 1985 (Owczarzak, 2010). As a result, instead of relying on existing networks organized around gay identity, new gay rights organizations used HIV/AIDS as a way to lend legitimacy to their groups in a hostile environment. As Owczarzak notes:

Lambda's founders viewed a commitment to HIV/AIDS prevention partially as a means through which the need for a gay rights and support organization could be justified in the highly homophobic context of postsocialist Poland (Owczarzak, 2010, p. 8).

Importantly though, the initial response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Poland came not from LG groups but from MONAR<sup>36</sup> (Youth Movement against Drug Addiction) a network of treatment centers for drug addiction established in the 1970s and led by Marek Kotański (O'Dwyer, 2012; Owczarzak, 2009). Initially working only with drug users, in the late 1980s MONAR began to include gays within its services as well as offering care to people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) (O'Dwyer, 2012). As the knowledge of the disease spread through the media, there soon was a backlash of hostility towards the centers and their inhabitants with local communities protesting against the running of the existing, and opening of new, centers (O'Dwyer, 2012; Owczarzak, 2009). Most notably, from 1990 until 1992, public protests (that at times turned violent) were held demanding the closing down of MONAR centers in Głusków and

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<sup>36</sup> MONAR stands for *Młodzieżowy Ruch na Rzecz Przeciwdziałania Narkomanii*. It was built on a model of treatment; detoxification and recovery that followed the ideas of the US based group Synanon. In MONAR drug addicts would live in detoxification centers isolated from society, people in treatment were required to make a pledge to stop using drugs, and violating this oath resulted in expulsion from the center. The centers aimed to be self-sufficient and their goal was to rebuild the personal roles and responsibilities damaged by addiction and personal histories (Górska, 2005).

Rembertów (both just outside of Warsaw), some of the protesters carried homophobic placards that read ‘Faggots out!’ (Owczarzak 2009, p. 429). Interestingly, as Owczarzak points out, disputes around MONAR centers became a litmus test of the levels of tolerance in the new democracy, where the reaction of local small-town residents was seen as at odds with modern European values that postsocialist Poland was eager to embrace:

The violent reactions against the homes caused some observers to lament Poland’s lack of “European” and “modern” values and behaviors. Importantly... residents of the towns in question were referred to as “*chłopi*,” or “peasants.” This portrayal underscored conceptions of them as somehow backward, uneducated, and intolerant. For example, the vice-minister of health in 1990, Krystyna Sienkiewicz ... declared, “If we want to be recognized as civilized people, we cannot allow situations such as those that happened in Głusków and Rembertów’ (Owczarzak, 2009, p. 431; emphasis in original).

The above quote signals how the discourse around LGBT issues in Poland was marked by class from its early stages and I return to the way class figures as an important dimension of LGBT politics and homophobia in Chapter 7. At the same time, in the 1990s public expressions of homophobia were not limited to small-town demonstrations, for example in 1991, another representative of the Ministry of Health, Kazimierz Kapera, in an interview for *Wiadomości* (News) on the Polish public channel TVP1 stated that: ‘AIDS is limited predominantly to one group... which in our view is deviant, so to [people who engage in] homosexual contacts’ (Górska, 2005). Following a public outcry, Kapera was dismissed by the then Prime Minister, Krzysztof Bielecki, three days after this statement, whilst the Polish Cardinal, Józef Glemp, expressed his support for him (ibid.). Despite these early public manifestations of homophobia, it is also important to note that anti-gay mobilization during the 1990s was, unlike later on, not tied to party politics and was largely disorganized and local in character (O'Dwyer, 2012).

At the same time and in response to the controversies surrounding MONAR centers, the Catholic Church in Poland started to engage with the HIV/AIDS epidemic, taking the moral position that it was its duty to look after the sick and working from the ‘hate the sin, love the sinner’ premise. In particular, Arkadiusz Nowak, a priest, began to promote Church-run hospice centers and his work eventually led to the establishment of state-run National

AIDS center in 1993. As a result, the network of HIV/AIDS services soon came to be dominated by the Church which closely cooperated with the state (O'Dwyer, 2012). The legacy of this alliance is still visible today, when the National AIDS Center remains the main organization for HIV/AIDS prevention and care for PLWHA at the national and regional levels (Owczarzak, 2009).

Moreover, what is notable is that around that time – from the final years of the socialist regime into the 1990s – homosexuality was not on the Church's agenda to the extent that it has become so later on. Thus, the Church was not active in the sphere of LGBT politics beyond its involvement in the care for HIV/AIDS patients, even though the Church was actively involved in politics at large, including politics of sexuality of the new democracy. Following the fall of state socialism, religious instruction in schools was reinstated in 1991; access to abortion was severely restricted in 1993; and in 1997 Poland signed Concordat with Rome (Ramet, 2006). Thus, as O'Dwyer (2012, p. 340) puts it: 'During this period... the Church put its stamp on a wide range of social issues' yet 'it apparently saw little need to engage with gay rights', arguably, because it did not perceive those as a threat.

At the same time the fledging Polish LG movement began to actively engage in preventive and educative efforts in the face of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, working on a local level, organizing a range of events, producing pamphlets about the disease and advocating safe sex (Górska, 2005). Thus, *Stowarzyszenie Lambda* integrated HIV prevention into its mandate dedicating two of its main goals to HIV: the first to promote models of behavior to prevent HIV and the second to collaborate with social and state organizations in the field of HIV prevention and fighting AIDS in general (Owczarzak, 2010).

Moreover, Jill Owczarzak writes that 'the presence of the socialist state and the effects of its surveillance, tied to the distribution of rights and resources, were not equally distributed across subjects living under these regimes', rather, they were influenced by variables such as race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, which 'served as key axes of differential engagement between the state and its subjects' (Owczarzak, 2009, p. 423). Owczarzak's point is important inasmuch as it allows us to think through the history of state socialism in a more

intersectional way, still, it would be naïve to think that the unevenness of state surveillance and distribution of rights looks dramatically different in the liberal democracy that succeeded it, a point I return to in the following chapters of this thesis. Nevertheless, the end of the socialist rule was of paramount importance to the LGBT movement in Poland for two reasons. On the one hand, it brought about the end of state censorship, which significantly curtailed the scope of activities under the socialist regime. On the other hand, and not unrelatedly, it opened possibilities for organizations that were largely unavailable under state socialism. In fact O'Dwyer (2012, p. 340) notes that in the 1990s Poland witnessed an 'explosion of new forms of association from political parties to interest organizations to social groups'. However, the power of the social taboo around homosexuality did not magically disappear with the socialist regime, rather it continued to influence what forms of association were possible and the personal risks activism entailed for Polish LG subjects. In the words of O'Dwyer:

Yet, though formal barriers had come down, less formal barriers remained. Social taboos against homosexuality remained strong even by post-communist standards. Aside from a few brave exceptions, individuals feared making their sexual orientation public. Identifying with, not to mention actually joining, a gay-rights group was risky to someone fearing the consequences of coming out, and this problem hobbled organization-building (O'Dwyer, 2012, p. 340).

Bearing that in mind, it becomes more understandable why the newly emerged LG organizations chose to focus their efforts on positivistic and educational work instead.<sup>37</sup> Some scholars have noted that such a propensity to frame their goals apolitically, with the HIV/AIDS issue at the center, has made it impossible for the Polish LG movement to properly take off in the first decade after the fall of the socialist regime (O'Dwyer, 2012; Owczarzak, 2010); as a result, O'Dwyer (2012) notes that by 1997 *Stowarzyszenie Lambda* was defunct, as its network of locally based branches disappeared. Following the disintegration of the movement, a new independent Warsaw-based group, *Lambda Warszawa* (Lambda Warsaw), was established in 1997, this group was

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<sup>37</sup> At the same time, the early 2000s looked rather promisingly in terms of political developments, with *Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej* (SLD) (The Alliance of the Democratic Left) winning the parliamentary elections; during the electoral campaign the left-wing SLD promised among other things to introduce anti-discrimination laws to protect sexual minorities and a same-sex partnership bill (Owczarzak, 2009).

the only registered LGBT organization in Poland until 2001 (Gruszczyńska, 2009b, p. 34).

### **3.2.3 LGBT movement in Poland in the context of the EU accession**

There has been a particularly strong... mobilization around LGBTQ politics since 2004, when public articulations of homophobia escalated and the question of 'homosexual rights' started to play an ever more important role in debates about national identity, values and sovereignty. EU accession triggered anxieties regarding social and cultural change (Binnie & Klesse, 2012, p. 456).

If in Poland homosexuality was rarely discussed under the socialist rule and if in the 1990s it was considered mainly through the lens of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the 2000s were the decade when the question of sexual minorities and their rights became a focus of intense political debate. Poland's aspirations to join the EU and the lengthy process of negotiations can be seen as factors that contributed to the reframing of the issue. As early as 1998 – the same year that accession negotiations started with Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Slovenia and Cyprus – the European Parliament issued a warning that it would not consent to the accession of any state that embraces laws that violates the human rights of lesbians and gays (M. Bell, 2001, p. 88). At the same time the situation of sexual minorities in Poland increasingly came under the scrutiny of Western European LGBT rights organizations. In a report prepared in 2001 by ILGA-Europe on the relevance of LG equality to the expansion of the Union, the section discussing Poland notes:

Poland is a member of the Council of Europe and the United Nations. Despite recommendations from the Council of Europe to promote tolerance and to promulgate legislation banning discrimination based on sexual orientation, the Polish government has not taken any such steps (Pawłęga, 2001, p. 56).

In the pre-accession screenings of the Polish law the European Commission decided that the Polish constitution did not provide sufficient protection from discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and it recommended changes to the labor code in particular. Initially, the Polish parliament strongly opposed the proposed changes, but eventually gave in to the pressure and sexual orientation was added as an anti-discrimination provision in the labor code (O'Dwyer, 2012, p. 342). These initial negotiations had a profound effect on the



shape of the debate around LG issues in Poland, as the use of conditionality reframed the question of LG equality and discrimination into a highly politicized matter, which in turn enabled it to be deployed in a range of arenas as a means of negotiating what it meant to be Polish in the face of EU accession (Graff, 2006; O'Dwyer, 2012).

Furthermore, the importance of the EU negotiations and Poland's ensuing accession to the EU was twofold: on the one hand 2004 signified Poland's 'return' to Europe, whilst on the other hand it could also be read as compromising the newly regained sovereignty of the state, threatening Polish culture and values, painstakingly preserved under the previous regime (Kulpa, 2012). And for the conservative sector of the society, sexuality and the question of LG rights became one of the areas in which the sovereign character of the Polish state was to be reasserted. In the words of Weseli:

In the socialist propaganda the homosexual – if he appeared – was seen as the spy from the depraved Western countries and he curiously remained in this role until today, although now he became a "Eurofaggot". The struggle for equal rights is interpreted by conservatives as endangering the "traditional Polish values (Weseli, 2009, p. 4).

It is therefore telling that in 2003 the lower house of the Polish Parliament, *Sejm*, issued a resolution regarding the sovereignty of Polish law in the subject of morality and culture, which read:

Heading towards the integration with other European countries within the structures of the European Union, and in the face of the referendum about Polish membership in the Union, the *Sejm* of the Republic of Poland declares that Polish law concerning the moral order of the social life, the dignity of the family, marriage and upbringing, and the protection of life – is [and shall be] by no means restricted by the international regulations (Sejm RP, 2003; quoted in Kulpa, 2012, p. 121).

Debates around sexuality and LG rights were in this context part of larger processes, which were met with varied levels of resistance and unease domestically. Consequently, many scholars consider 2004 to be the 'turning point' in Polish LGBTQ politics, a moment of radicalization brought about by an intensification of public homophobia where gays and lesbians served as the scape goats for anxieties related to joining the EU (Binnie & Klesse, 2012; Gruszczyńska, 2009a; Törnquist-Plewa & Malmgren, 2007). At the same time, as noted by Brzezińska (2011, p. 116) 'for the LGBT community the EU

membership raised hopes for an institutional improvement of their situation', as the prerequisite for Polish legislation to comply with EU laws on equality as well as institutional leverage against discriminatory practices of the state gave the Polish LGBT organizations an incentive to intensify their claims for equality and full participation.

2004 being the year of accession was one when tensions around LGBT issues ran high and the topic was a priority on the political agenda. The newly emerged political right-wing parties were not only nationalist and extremely Eurosceptic, but also outwardly homophobic; *Liga Polskich Rodzin* (The League of Polish Families) (LPR) and *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (PiS) (Law and Justice) being the prime examples (Pankowski, 2009). Together with *Młodzież Wszechpolska* (All-Poland Youth), a militant arm of the LPR, and *Radio Maryja* a radio station run by the ultra-conservative Catholic priest, Father Rydzyk, PiS and LPR became the main political actors behind anti-LG mobilizations around the time of accession.<sup>38</sup> In the general elections in 2001, PiS and LPR received 9.5% and 7.9% of the votes, respectively (O'Dwyer, 2012, p. 342). In the 2005 elections PiS won 27% of the votes coming first, followed by the center-right *Platforma Obywatelska* (PO) (Civic Platform) with 24%, whilst LPR received 8% of the votes (Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza, 2005). The resulting coalition of PiS, LPR and *Samoobrona* (Self-defense) – a smaller populist agrarian party – made the already dire situation of the Polish LGBT community even worse. In the words of Marta Abramowicz:

In 2005–2006, members of the major political powers openly expressed their stereotypical and biased opinions towards homosexuals... The sanctioning of prejudice towards gays and lesbians by the representatives then in power encouraged other groups (e.g., football fans and neo-nazi groups) to resort to violence against LGB persons and created a climate where gays and lesbians were afraid to disclose their sexual orientation (Abramowicz, 2012, p. 13).

The overall atmosphere, in which homophobic statements by state officials became the norm paired with the conservative sexual politics promoted by the PiS-led coalition generated criticism from the European Parliament with the passing of resolutions in 2006 and 2007 condemning homophobia in Poland

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<sup>38</sup> According to some scholars the popularity of *Radio Maryja* has a very acute class dimension as it is grounded in its ability to not only mobilize but also represent these groups in Polish society for whom the transformation did not result in the improvement of living standards (Graff, 2006).

(Graff, 2010; Kulpa & Mizielińska, 2011). Meanwhile, in the public discourse, the question of LG equality once again came to serve as an indication of civilizational advancement; as Graff (2006) highlights, candidates' attitudes towards sexual minorities became one of the key themes of the 2005 presidential election serving as a litmus test for their views on modern democracy, 'traditional values' and freedom of speech. And people's views on the extent of rights that should be granted to LG persons came also to demarcate the difference between the so-called Poland A (progressive, liberal, EU-embracing) and Poland B (backwards, traditional and EU-skeptical) with which groups such as *Radio Maryja*, PiS and LPR became associated (Zubrzycki, 2006).

At the same time the Polish LGBT movement, faced with the radicalization of the political debate around LGBT issues, was becoming better organized and was slowly working towards redefining the terms of engagement with the wider public. The key moments for gay and lesbian visibility and by extension also for anti-gay mobilization became first the *Niech nas zobaczą* (Let them see us) campaign and then the series of events and confrontations around the organizing of Polish equivalents of the gay pride parades in 2004 and 2005 called *marsze równości* (equality marches) (Gruszczyńska, 2007; Sypniewski & Warkocki, 2004). The organization behind these events *Kampania Przeciw Homofobii* (KPH) (Campaign Against Homophobia) was established in 2001 and it could be characterized by a much more political profile than any of its predecessors.<sup>39</sup> The events surrounding the crucial moments of *Let Them See Us* and the marches deserve to be discussed in some detail, as they are illustrative of the shift towards both politicization but also visibility and demands for rights that occurred in the discourse on LGBT issues in Poland during the 2000s.

The *Let Them See Us* campaign has been credited with bringing homosexuality into the public sphere for the very first time (Warkocki, 2004, p. 153; Gruszczyńska 2009, p. 35). It was initiated by KPH in March 2003 and consisted of photographs of Polish same-sex couples holding hands (15 gay and

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<sup>39</sup> One of the co-founders of KPH was Robert Biedroń, who also remained its chairman from 2001 until 2009. Today, Biedroń is arguably the most famous gay in Poland. During his political career he was first a member of SLD (The Alliance of the Democratic Left), before joining Ruch Palikota (Palikot's Movement) (later renamed *Twój Ruch* (Your Movement)). In 2011 he became the first openly gay Polish MP. In November 2014 Biedroń ran for office and was elected a mayor of Słupsk.

15 lesbian) displayed on billboards in Warsaw, Kraków, Gdańsk and in the Silesia region (Kampania Przeciw Homofobii, 2015a).<sup>40</sup> According to KPH's website the campaign's role was to show that gays and lesbians look just like anyone else to counter ignorance and misconceptions.<sup>41</sup>

In 2003 nobody talked about gays and lesbians, and when they did, the media would show pictures from [pride] parades from Western Europe. The average Pole knew as much, that a gay is a guy who dresses up like woman and about lesbians he knew nothing, unless he watched porn (Kampania Przeciw Homofobii, 2015a).

In short, the aim of the campaign was to show gays and lesbians as 'normal', who in the words of Zbigniew Warkocki 'are... people. Simply. They have a tomato sandwich for breakfast and watch TV in the evenings' (Warkocki, 2004, p. 154).<sup>42</sup> The campaign was decried as a provocation; an act of advertising of homosexuality aimed to shock and horrify the unsuspecting public, and an attack on the moral order of society and its traditional values (Warkocki, 2004). PiS and LPR politicians, church representatives and *Młodzież Wszechpolska* were all openly denouncing the campaign and many of the billboards were vandalized. Despite the backlash of criticisms *Let Them See Us* was a success insomuch as it confronted the Polish people with the fact that some of their compatriots were homosexual (Brzezińska, 2011; Warkocki, 2004).

The other crucial developments for the LGBT politics and organization in Poland in 2000s relate to the equality marches, in particular those organized in 2004 and 2005, so exactly around the time of the EU accession.<sup>43</sup> In both of these years the city authorities, under the leadership of the President of Warsaw, later president of Poland (2005-2010) and a twin brother of the current leader of PiS, Lech Kaczyński, banned the Warsaw March for Equality arguing that they

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<sup>40</sup> The campaign was co-financed amongst others by the Prime Minister's Office and the Dutch Embassy in Warsaw.

<sup>41</sup> On the discussion of how the campaign's overinvestment in respectability, normality and coupledom as well as its middle class, urban, and ageist bias see (Śmiszek & Szczepłocki, 2012, p. 174).

<sup>42</sup> Having *kanapki* (bread with for example cheese, or ham and tomato) for breakfast is very common in Poland.

<sup>43</sup> The first march – with a LGBTQ focus – the Warsaw Equality Parade, took place in 2001 organized by the Polish branch of the International Lesbian and Gay Cultural Network (ILGCN) (Kulpa, 2012, pp. 171-185). The 2002 and 2003 marches in Warsaw gathered 2000 and 3500 participants respectively, with little media attention (Binnie & Klesse, 2012, p. 447) and it was not until 2004 and 2005 that the Polish marches became a focus of national and eventually also international attention.

would not allow for the disruption that public parading and ‘promotion of homosexuality’ would cause. When faced with an argument about the right to freedom of assembly, Kaczyński stated that gays and lesbians are free to demonstrate as *citizens*, but not as homosexuals (Siedlecka, 2005). In June 2005, several thousand activists marched in Warsaw in defiance of the ban, whilst Kaczyński allowed for a counter-demonstration, called ‘Parade of Normality’ organized by the already mentioned ultra-conservative *Młodzież Wszechpolska*.<sup>44</sup>

In May 2004, the first March for Tolerance in Kraków took place. The participants walked through the city center protected by the police, carrying rainbow and EU flags and placards, and banners with slogans such as: ‘Legality, Plurality, Equality’, ‘I’m lesbian, I’m human, I’m Polish’ (Kubica, 2006, p. 76). Along the route they were met with a violent counter-demonstration from *Młodzież Wszechpolska* as well as from local football hooligans, who came together to insult and intimidate the 1500 people strong parade, the banners they carried read ‘Stop homosexuality’, ‘Homosexuals from all around the world get medical help’, ‘Gas the faggots’ and ‘The street are ours – the clinics yours’ (Kubica, 2006, p. 77). When confronted with this angry lot the organizers decided to discontinue the march, yet as they were dispersing some of them were chased and assaulted by the participants of the counterdemonstration (Kubica, 2006). In retrospect of the event the Church and the right-wing politicians alike condemned the march calling it a blasphemous provocation, lamenting the desecration of the city, whilst right wing press was full of arguments that could best be summarized as ‘if you must be gay, keep it to yourself’ (ibid.).

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<sup>44</sup> During the 2000s, banning of pride parades or violent attacks on them were not exclusively Polish phenomena; pride parades were banned or attacked in a number of places: Budapest in 2007, Bucharest in 2005, Chisinau 2005–2007, Moscow 2006 and 2007 and Riga in 2005 and 2006 (Górska, 2005). The extent of the problem resulted in ILGA-Europe’s publication ‘*Prides against Prejudice. A Toolkit for Pride Organizing in a Hostile Environment*’ (Gruszczńska, 2009c).

Finally, the Poznań March of Equality took place on 19 November 2005, despite an earlier ban issued by the mayor of the city.<sup>45</sup> When the march went ahead despite the ban, it was broken up by the police and the brutal handling of the peacefully demonstrating participants sparked a discussion on not only discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation but also on broader issues of freedom of assembly in a democratic state (Gruszczyńska, 2009a). On the one hand, local religious and some political authorities constructed the event as going against ‘public decency’, ‘morality’ and ‘divine rights’ (Gruszczyńska, 2007, 2009a). On the other hand, the events in Poznań sparked a huge wave of protests and a week later rallies were staged nationwide in solidarity with its organizers.<sup>46</sup> What was also particularly important about the Poznań march was its mobilizational aspect; drawing on the legacy of Solidarity the organizers made a claim to redefine who can take up public space and how and the brutal treatment that they were met with provided the basis for mobilizing people who had previously been indifferent to the cause of LGBT rights (Gruszczyńska, 2007; 2009c, p. 326).

Overall, the time around the EU accession has been both turbulent and formative for the Polish LGBT movement. Joining the EU also reinforced the transnationalization of Polish LGBT politics, for instance, most of the marches were attended by a number of foreign supporters, in particular from Germany and the UK, as well as representatives of Western European embassies in Poland (Ayoub, 2013; Binnie & Klesse, 2012; Holzacker, 2013). In addition, in the 2000s LGBTQ groups began to use their European connections in order to put pressure on the state from outside (Binnie & Klesse, 2012). Importantly, such increased transnationalization also enabled mechanisms for recourse in the face of unjust state decisions. Thus, for instance, the ban on the Warsaw equality march in 2005 was brought before the European Court of Human Rights, which in 2007 declared it to be a violation of Articles 11 and 14 of the European Convention of Human Rights, pertaining to the freedom of assembly

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<sup>45</sup> The ban of the Poznan March was issued only a month after the elections, becoming to the organizers and wider LGBT community a symbol of the new political regime (Gruszczyńska, 2009c, p. 320).

<sup>46</sup> Internationally, solidarity events took place in New York, Berlin, Budapest, London, and Vienna. Moreover, the ban on the Poznan March was declared illegal in December 2005 by the Regional Administrative Court and as a result the third march of Equality in Poznan in 2006 took place as planned and without further disturbances (Gruszczyńska, 2009c, p. 325).

(Van den Bogaert, 2007). The marches have in that sense also served as points of departure for a variety of new ways to engage with both the national as well as transnational actors. Last, but not least, an important opportunity for the Polish LGBT movement that emerged from the experiences of the equality marches in the 2000s, has been the chance to build coalitions with other civil movements fighting for a fairer and more democratic society (Binnie & Klesse, 2012; Gruszczyńska, 2009a).<sup>47</sup>

### **3.2.4 Weathering the storm? Situation of LGBT people and the LGBT movement in Poland since 2007**

After enduring intense political attack from 2004 to 2007, the gay-rights movement emerged stronger than before. Since 2007, gay-rights issues are no longer as visible in politics as before, but the movement has continued to lobby effectively using the organizational resources built up during its experience under siege (O'Dwyer, 2012, p. 344).

In the above quote, O'Dwyer suggests that a positive change has occurred on the 'gay-rights' front in Poland since 2007, and indeed reports issued by Polish LGBT groups suggest that some progress, has in fact been made (Abramowicz, 2012). There are several factors that can be said to have contributed to this improvement in the first half of the 2010s and the fact that the conservative and outright homophobic PiS lost the parliamentary elections in 2007 is certainly one of them (Józko, 2009; Kulpa & Mizielińska, 2011). Curiously, the winning party, PO (Civic Platform) – considered by many 'the lesser evil' (Kulpa, 2012) in comparison to the previous administration – was far from progressive on the matters of sexuality or LGBT equality. Yet, according to Struzik (2012) being also strongly pro-EU, PO presented a more 'civilized' as opposed to 'barbaric' face of homophobia. Thus,

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<sup>47</sup> According Gruszczyńska the Poznan Marches in 2006 and 2007 had a strong coalitional character that 'was apparent already in the preparatory phase, where the activists took great care to include representatives of local anarchist, ecologist and disability rights groups among the organizing team'; a strategy that over time resulted in the increased cohesion between various local groups (ILGA - Europe, 2006). Similar efforts have also taken place in other places across the country contributing to the strengthening of the LGBTQ movement. In the words of Binnie and Kleese what emerged is a broad solidarity movement: 'involving feminists, left-wing or progressive movements, organizations and parties, Jewish community groups, disabled people, artists, workers and transnational actors. As part of this process Polish LGBTQ activists have built multilayered solidarity relations' (Binnie & Klesse, 2012, p. 456).

one can gather the impression that in political discourse the phenomenon called “barbaric homophobia”, which results in assaulting LGBT people straightforwardly... is more frequently being replaced by “civilized homophobia”, which refers to a broadly interpreted notion of tolerance, but it does not contribute towards improving the situation of gays, lesbians, bisexual and transgender persons and only aims to maintain the status quo (Struzik, 2012, p. 124).

In the run up to the local elections in 2006 LGBT NGOs were in fact encouraging people to vote for PO and Lambda Warszawa ran a campaign *‘Want tolerance? Choose one!’* This campaign included posters with this slogan put in places frequented by gays and lesbians such as bars, clubs, coffee bars and other ‘gay friendly’ venues (Kulpa, 2012, p. 190). In his attempt to analyze the roots of support for a party that is neither progressive, nor interested in furthering the cause of LGBT equality Kulpa looks to the demographic of the LGBT organizations themselves, pointing out the privileged positions of their members:

LGBT activists are mainly in their twenties and thirties, students, young professionals, in major urban agglomerations of Poland. They occupy a rather privileged social and cultural position, but also economic one. They are the first generation of Poles brought up under the new regime of a capitalist economy, hence possibly finding it easier (than older generations of Poles, also homosexual ones but not activists or from outside of the described position of privilege) to navigate their lives in the maze of demands, rules and regulations of market economy and liberal democracy (Kulpa, 2012, p. 197).

What Kulpa considers problematic in this context is the lack of consideration – displayed in his view by LGBT activists in Poland – of ‘inequality as an intersectional and multi-faceted social problem, one that always interweaves sexuality with other identity positions (like gender, access to education and hence career prospects thus ability to live a fulfilling life, religious beliefs, and rootedness in other communities/identities/identifications, etc.)’ (ibid.). Such inattention to other axes of difference is in turn leading to ‘a situation where certain gay and lesbian people will feel abandoned’ by activists who claim to represent them ‘precisely because they do not occupy a similar, fairly privileged subject position to that of an “activist” (ibid.). According to Kulpa this is indeed, the case in Poland where local sociological studies show growing divisions between older and younger, rural and metropolitan gays and lesbians, and the LGBT activists’ politics (such as openly supporting a neoliberal political party) can be considered to reinscribe ‘social divisions within own group, even if it seeks to abolish those divisions between themselves and the



whole society' (Kulpa, 2012, pp. 197, 198).<sup>48</sup> Kulpa's observations are of importance and I return to the demographic make up of the Polish LGBT movement in Chapter 7, where I examine how it affects the way in which LGBT politics in Poland are shaped.

One of the consequences of the political situation in Poland in the most recent decade – where PO was in power after winning the most seats in parliament (in both 2007 and 2011 general elections), followed by PiS which came second on both occasions (Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza, 2007, 2011) – is that real change in terms of legislation extending rights to LGBT persons or protecting them from discrimination has been slow to materialize. Arguably, the situation became even more dire when the 2015 parliamentary elections saw PiS take majority of seats with the party getting almost 38% of the total vote; more worryingly, the 2015 elections also resulted in an effective disappearance of the left from the Polish parliament.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, the role of LGBT organizations has been crucial, as the lack of state support and formal initiatives to bring about legal changes place the burden of protecting the LGBT community from discrimination and monitoring its situation disproportionately on the third sector. Thus,

[r]esearch, education projects and social campaigns are, in most cases, carried out by the third sector or informal groups with extremely little support or participation from state or local authorities. Social movements are now solely responsible for

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<sup>48</sup> Organizations such as the Association of Lambda Groups and KPH have been criticized for their predominantly gay male agenda (Śmiszek & Szczepłocki, 2012; Weseli, 2009). Thus, many lesbians are said to have shared a sense of invisibility until as late as the mid-2000s, when the existing organizations began to consciously work towards becoming more inclusive of lesbians. Also, queer and anarchy-feminist organizing began to gain momentum in the late 2000s (Weseli, 2009). Bisexuality on the other hand has remained contentious in the larger framework of Polish LGBT politics. And so has been the case transgender, even if the establishment of Trans-Fuzja in 2007 has created more visibility for trans politics (Mizielińska and Kulpa, 2011). Established in 2004, in Kraków, *Fundacja Kultura dla Tolerancji* (Culture for Tolerance Foundation) has also been providing a space for trans art and events, including the planned for May 2015 *Trans\*Festiwal* (Trans\*Festival) (Fundacja Kultura dla Tolerancji, 2015).

<sup>49</sup> The political left has been largely unsuccessful in the last three elections, despite its success in 2001 when the electoral alliance of SLD (The Alliance of the Democratic Left) and UP (Labour United) won 47% of all votes (PO came second with 14%). In the 2011 elections SLD gathered only 8% of votes. RP being the only alternative won 10% in 2011, but their support has been dwindling ever since (Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011). In the 2015 elections the left-wing coalition Zjednoczona Lewica (ZL)(United Left) they failed to make it into parliament with 7,55% of the total vote (Poland has an 8% electoral threshold for coalitions); ZL was weakened by the emergence of a new, leftist party Razem (Together), which got 3,62% the votes, effectively splitting the left vote.

representing the problems of the LGBT community in public discourse since the Polish authorities for many years have consistently refused to pursue any horizontal antidiscrimination... that would be realized on both national and local levels (Struzik, 2012, p. 123).

Initiatives such as *'Razem bezpieczniej'* (Safer together) focused on providing support for persons who experience homophobic violence run by KPH (Kampania Przeciw Homofobii, 2015c) or *'Szkoły przyjazne uczennicom i uczniom LGBT'* (LGBT pupil-friendly schools) by Lambda Warszawa (Lambda Warszawa, 2015) are good examples of how LGBT organizations take on the role of educators and protectors filling the gap that exists where the Polish state is failing the LGBT community.

At the same time, the most recent data available on the prevalence of homophobia suggest that 'a high percentage of bisexuals and homosexuals still experience physical and psychological violence on the grounds of sexual orientation (12% physical and 44% psychological)' and that such violence remains largely unreported (90% of incidents were not reported to the police). Moreover, even though the situation has improved in comparison to previous years for which data was collected, bisexuals and homosexuals in Poland are still exposed to discrimination in pretty much every sphere of life; 'in the workplace, at schools/universities, in their place of residence, in public places (offices, bars, clubs and on public transport) and in dealings with representatives of the health service and of the church' (Struzik, 2012, p. 123). In a study conducted in 2009 on LGBT people's situation, the majority of respondents listed the Catholic Church and groups associated with it as well as certain right-wing political parties (in particular PiS and LPR) as major sources of discrimination, prejudice against and hostility towards LGBT persons in Poland (Józko, 2009, pp. 15-19).<sup>50</sup>

As previously discussed, the importance of the Church remains high in the Polish context<sup>51</sup> – even though, as also previously mentioned its opinions on a range of matters, including sexuality are widely disregarded – whilst the

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<sup>50</sup> Importantly, and as pointed out by Polish scholars and activists alike (see for example Abramowicz, 2012, p. 12; Świerszcz, 2011), homophobia and violence motivated by homophobia are not unusual in other EU countries, what is however unusual, is the *indifference* with which the Polish state institutions approach the problem and the lack or ineffectiveness of measures aimed to address it.

<sup>51</sup> For a thorough analysis of the reasons behind the privileged position of the Church in contemporary Poland see Ostolski (ed.) (*Kościół, państwo i polityka płci* 2010).

dominant position of the Church towards LGBT people has hardly changed since the 1970s.<sup>52</sup> In Poland, it is not uncommon for Catholic priests, organizations and press to speak out against LGBT persons, demonize them and openly deny them rights; it is also not unusual to recommend treatment (Kościańska, 2012). Moreover, any actions undertaken by the LGBT community to further the cause of equality or to counteract discrimination are decried as ‘homosexual propaganda’ aimed at destroying the Catholic family, society and life itself (ibid.). The close connection between mainstream Catholicism and homophobia in Poland can also be explored through an analysis of the many mainstream Catholic websites, where homosexuality is routinely pathologized, equated with zoophilia, addiction and perversion (see for example Terlikowski, 2010; Wiara.Pl, 2010); at best homosexuals are called to live a chaste life and not give into their ‘disordered’ tendencies (Chrześcijanin Homoseksualny, 2015).

Nevertheless, and despite high levels of prejudice amongst the conservative sectors of the society, some positive change, even though limited, did in fact occur for the Polish LGBT community. Thus, in April 2008 the office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment was created, to counteract the lack of statutory anti-discrimination solutions and partially also as a result of the pressure of the European Commission and Polish NGOs (Struzik, 2012, p. 124). Then, in January 2011, an additional act prohibiting discrimination in the areas not regulated by the Labor Code was introduced. However, the act was criticized as inadequate and ineffective at preventing discrimination; according to its rules the premise of sexual orientation provides protection only in the narrowest scope, embracing the most basic aspects of employment and work (Binnie & Klesse, 2012, p. 447). There has also been an ongoing debate on the necessity of hate speech legislation that would safeguard LGBT persons.<sup>53</sup> Here again, the pressure from international bodies responsible

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<sup>52</sup> At the same time, not all religious groups in Poland take an anti-LGBT stand; a small progressive section of the Catholic Church exists that looks for ways to reinterpret the Church’s teaching, while for example the Calvinist Church in Poland is engaged officially in that matter (Kościańska, 2012, p. 165). There are also marginal Christian churches, such as the Reformed Catholic Church of Poland affirming of LGBT people (Puchalski, 2015).

<sup>53</sup> As Śmiszek and Szczepłocki (Śmiszek & Szczepłocki, 2012, p. 172) point out, Polish law does not protect LGBT individuals against defamation or insults, even though such protection is extended to groups ‘singled out on the basis of nationality, race or religion’.

for the protection and promotion of human rights has been continuous and various international actors have pointed out the need for changes in Polish law with regard to equal treatment and counteracting discrimination also based on sexual orientation and criminalizing homophobic hate speech, repeatedly. Some recent examples include the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR)<sup>54</sup> in 2008 and the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in 2010.<sup>55</sup>

Recent years have also brought a series of debates concerning the legal regulation of same-sex relationships, which are yet to be recognized in Polish law. Even though same-sex unions appeared on the agenda of the political left (SLD) as early as in 2001, it was not until June 2009 that the Initiative Group for the Civil Partnerships was established with the aim to conduct public consultations regarding the Civil Partnership bill, and to propose a bill that would regulate informal relationships, including same-sex unions (Śmiszek & Szczepłocki, 2012, p. 184). The atmosphere surrounding the discussions around this issue was strongly influenced by the views of the Church and was summarized as follows by Justyna Struzik:

The authorities of the Polish Catholic Church... repeatedly treat the notion of the family as the reproduction of a heteronormative order, based on the heterosexual model of passive femininity and active masculinity. In 2011, the Church authorities appealed several times to politicians to not “succumb to lobby pressure of certain groups” ... and to prevent “the dismantling of the family” (Struzik, 2012, p. 136).

Nevertheless, the Polish parliament has considered legislative proposals for same-sex unions on three separate occasions in 2010s; in July 2012, a majority of MPs in *Sejm* blocked a debate on a proposed draft on civil partnership law; in January 2013, when three separate projects – prepared by the Civic Platform

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<sup>54</sup> ECSR urged the Polish government to provide information on measures taken to fight discrimination based on sexual orientation, as well as to provide information on the practices of the Polish courts with ‘regard to the application of the provisions prohibiting the unequal treatment of LGB persons in employment’ (Gruszczyńska, 2009a, p. 50).

<sup>55</sup> UNHRC recommendations included: further amending the Law on Equal Treatment to allow for protection from discrimination based on all grounds as well as ensuring that all allegations of attacks and threats against people targeted because of their sexual orientation or gender identity are taken seriously and properly investigated (Śmiszek & Szczepłocki, 2012).

(PO), the Alliance of the Democratic Left (SLD) and Palikot's Movement (RP) were rejected (Struzik, 2012, p. 137); in January 2014 the *Sejm* voted against bringing a new project, prepared by Your Movement (TR), up for discussion (Siedlecka, 2013).<sup>56</sup> On each occasion when the proposals were up for debate and eventually dismissed or rejected, representatives of the Church applauded the MPs' decision to vote against them, referring to common sense, 'real family' values and the victory of conscience (Katolicka Agencja Informacyjna, 2012; Przeworski, 2013). At the same time, Polish LGBT organizations continue to actively lobby for the cause (Lambda Warszawa, 2014) and the general support for introducing legislation that would allow for same-sex unions has been steadily growing over the last decade (CBOS, 2013b, p. 6).

Finally, what is also worth noting is that the visibility of LGBT persons in the public sphere and at the highest levels of politics has increased significantly, even if momentarily, after the 2011 elections: alongside the already mentioned openly gay Robert Biedroń, Anna Grodzka became the first transgender Polish MP.<sup>57</sup> Both Grodzka and Biedroń run from the RP's party list (Struzik, 2012). Moreover, Polish LGBT organizations have actively worked towards gaining support from the wider public by seeking out 'allies' to their cause. For instance, in 2014 KPH started its '*Ramię w ramię*' campaign in which Polish celebrities and influential Poles speak out against homophobia and declare their support for LGBT equality on social media (Kampania Przeciw Homofobii, 2015b). Overall, the percentage of Poles who declare that they personally know a gay or a lesbian has also grown from 16% in 2005 up to 25%

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<sup>56</sup> Interestingly, the fact that same-sex relationships remain legally unregulated in Poland has proven challenging from the perspective of freedom of movement of people within the EU, where such unions are legal in all but nine countries. Problems were reported with registry offices refusing to issue a certificate of marital status to Polish citizens who wish to enter same-sex unions abroad. The Committee on Petitions of the European Parliament and the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) who sit on this Commission have been demanding explanation from the Polish Government pointing out that such practices of the Polish administration 'violate the basic principles of the European Union, namely the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and the freedom of movement of the people in the EU' (TVN24, 2014). Nevertheless, the difficulties with obtaining the documents necessary to enter same-sex unions in other member states prevail. In March 2015, a lawyer and a lecturer at University of Warsaw, Jakub Urbanik, sued the registry office in Warsaw after being refused a certificate of marital status required for entering a same-sex marriage in Spain; he argued that the office's decision had an ideological and not legal character (Śmiszek & Szczepłocki, 2012, p. 174).

<sup>57</sup> Some positive developments also occurred at a local level, with a few examples of openly gay or lesbian individuals becoming Village Administrators (*wójt*) (Struzik, 2012).

in 2013, suggesting a growing number of LG persons choose to be open about their sexual orientation (CBOS, 2013b, p. 2).

To sum up, as illustrated above, the progress of LGBT equality in Poland has been both uneven and relatively slow.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, some Polish LGBT organizations have become both more professional and centralized, as they continue to carry the disproportionate burden due to the lack of state initiatives and support on the matter. Finally, whilst the Church initially did not engage in the debate on sexual minorities, since the 2000s it has become more vocal on the matter and conservative Catholic groups have become one of the most active anti-LGBT actors in the country. It is in this context that RT first arrived in Poland in the 2000s and it is under the above outlined conditions that it continues to operate. To contextualize RT as a practice, in the second part of this chapter I trace its development in the US, discussing some of the issues and challenges as well as responses to the latter that emerged over the last couple of decades.

### **3.3 Where science meets religion – RT in the US**

Despite the lack of scholarly analysis of RT in Poland, the phenomenon has been widely studied in the US (see for example Arthur, McGill, & Essary, 2014; Beckstead, 2002; Drescher, 1998, 2002; Erzen, 2006; Ginicola, 2011; Grace, 2008; Haldeman, 1994; Halpert, 2000; Shidlo, Schroeder, & Drescher, 2002). At the same time, it is extremely hard to establish the exact scope of RT in the US or even to estimate the number of RT groups that operate in the US today, this is partly due to the largely unregulated nature of the framework within which they operate (many of them are charitable organizations, and/or affiliated with local religious institutions). SameSexAttraction.Org (2015b) lists over thirty different groups that ‘can provide education and help in dealing with same-sex attractions’ and that operate in the US today; the list includes among others Free To Be Me, Homosexuals Anonymous, Focus On The Family, People Can Change, NARTH, and Courage (ibid.). Additionally, the site also provides a breakdown of Catholic, Mormon, Presbyterian, United Methodist,

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<sup>58</sup> The notion of progress is problematic and it is worth emphasizing that the trajectory of the Polish LGBT movement and by extension the situation of LGBT people in Poland can not easily be assessed by making linear comparisons with the ‘West’ (Kulpa & Mizelińska, 2011).

Jewish and Christian non-denominational organizations devoted to same-sex attraction ‘issues’ (SameSexAttraction.org, 2015c).

At the same time, even though the global reach of the US-based RT groups remains unexamined, some scholars acknowledge that RT *is* actually a global phenomenon; according to Robinson and Spivey, RT has continued to grow ‘from a handful of evangelical Christian ministries’ in the 1970s into a global movement in the twenty-first century (Robinson & Spivey, 2007, p. 650). A quick survey of the most prominent RT groups’ websites in the US suggests that these organizations do indeed now operate on a global scale, a point that I will return to later on in this chapter. What is also interesting about Robinson and Spivey’s observation is their particular view on the origins of RT; as in my view, locating RT origins in the activities of religious ministries misses the very important point on how its emergence cannot be divorced from psychotherapy, psychiatry and medicine.<sup>59</sup> In the US, the medical, psychological and psychiatric classification of homosexuality as a psychopathology marked its history until 1973 and until that year efforts to reorient sexual desire (exclusively from homosexual to heterosexual) or studies of viability of such efforts had been incorporated into the broad spectrum of practices within these disciplines (Drescher, 2002; Grace, 2008). Consequently, I argue with Drescher (2002) – that RT’s origins are to be found in psychoanalysis rather than Christian dogma, even if the latter appears to converge with it on the belief in the unquestionable heteronormativity of human sexuality and might well be its final destination; a point that I revisit below. This is of significance as the scientific origins of RT have influenced not only the way it has developed but also the way it is marketed and the way in which RT practitioners respond to critique today.

At the same time, it is important to note that it is not my intention to fully account for the broad range and scope of RT practices over time, rather, what I aim to do is discuss some of the key ideas and theorists that have influenced the way RT looks like today and that in result also bear on the shape of RT in Poland. In the remaining part of this chapter I discuss the emergence and development of RT in the US, focusing on key figures, dates and ideas. I then

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<sup>59</sup> It is however true that religious ‘ex-gay’ ministries began to emerge in the US as early as in the 1970s, i.e. Love in Action was established in San Francisco in 1973 (Besen, 2003, pp. 62-63).

move onto discussing some of the criticisms that RT has faced in the US context and how RT organizations have responded to those. Finally, I briefly discuss the extent to which US RT groups have sought to reach global markets.

### 3.3.1 Reparative Therapy in the US – Foundations and Influences

Homosexuality is assuredly no advantage, but it is nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation; it cannot be classified as an illness; we consider it to be a variation of the sexual function, produced by certain arrest of sexual development (Freud & Freud, 1960)

Although other treatment modalities such as aversion therapies and psychosurgery have also promised to “cure” homosexuality, the history of reparative therapies has become inexorably linked with that of psychoanalysis (Drescher, 2002, p. 6).

Reparative therapy (RT) – a term coined relatively late, in 1991, by Joseph Nicolosi (1991) – broadly understood, refers to psychotherapeutic cures intended to change an individual’s sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual.<sup>60</sup> RT, as it is known today, has been influenced mostly by theories of people like Sandor Rado (1969), Irving Bieber (1962), Charles Socarides (1968, 1978), and more recently Joseph Nicolosi (1991, 1993), and to a lesser extent, Richard Cohen (2000, 2012).<sup>61</sup> What these scholars have in common is that they oppose the view of homosexuality as natural and argue that heterosexuality is the only biological norm. RT’s beginnings can be traced back to psychoanalysis and in particular the early reparative therapists drew heavily on Freud’s ideas of human sexuality and its development in their attempt to a) prove that homosexuality is a disorder and b) discuss its causes and potential cures (Drescher, 2002). This is despite the fact that Freud’s position on homosexuality was far from clear and his work on the issue is filled with contradictions.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> RT is also known as sexual orientation conversion therapy, re-orientation therapy, or simply conversion therapy (Halpert, 2000); in the US, groups that promote RT are also often referred to as the ‘ex-gay’ movement.

<sup>61</sup> Cohen is usually overlooked in the scholarship on RT in the US, as his work mainly recycles the standard themes of RT without adding much to the discussion. Nevertheless, I choose to list him here because a) his theories are often cited by Polish RT groups b) along with Nicolosi he is one of the better known authors of books on RT c) he is an example of a well-established RT practitioner who engages in international promotional work d) his organization has been around for 25 years, is exempt from paying taxes and enjoys a charitable status, which makes it exemplary of the way RT groups operate in the US.

<sup>62</sup> Even if – or possibly also precisely because of the fact that – Freud’s position on the matter remains opaque, attempts at finding ‘the “real Freud” are too often motivated by those who seek his agreement with their own point of view’ (Drescher, 2002, p. 7) and RT theorists are a good



Consequently, Rado's (1969) theory of homosexuality is based on the dismissal of Freud's belief in psychological bisexuality. Rado argued that Freud's idea of libidinal bisexuality was constructed on a faulty analogy with anatomical bisexuality, a 19th-century belief in embryonic hermaphroditism, or the hypothesis that every embryo had the potential to become an anatomical man or a woman (Rado, 1969, pp. 215-216). Refuting Freud's model of human sexual development he developed his own evolutionary paradigm in which heterosexuality is the only non-pathological result, based on centrality he gave to the organism's ability to reproduce (Rado, 1969, p. 210).

The human organism... may be defined as a self-regulating biological system that perpetuates itself and its type by means of its environment, its surrounding system... In the theory of evolution, the crowning achievement of eighteenth and nineteenth-century biologists, *adaptive value* is a statistical concept which epitomizes *reproductive efficiency* in a certain environment. This is strongly influenced by the type's ability to survive. Hence, "*more adaptive*" means *more able to survive and reproduce* (Rado, 1969, p. 4; emphasis in original).

Since homosexuality is understood as being at odds with the reproductive agenda of the organism, it is explained away as a form of maladaptation, an arrested development brought about, in Rado's view, by parental failures:

The male-female sexual pattern is dictated by anatomy... Why is the so-called homosexual forced to escape from the male-female pair into a homogenous pair? ... [T]he familiar campaign of deterrence that parents wage to prohibit the sexual activity of the child. The campaign causes the female to view the male organ as a destructive weapon. Therefore the female partners are reassured by the absence in both of them of the male organ. The campaign causes the male to see in the mutilated female organ a reminder of inescapable punishment. When... fear and resentment of the opposite organ becomes insurmountable, the individual may escape into homosexuality... Homosexuality is a deficient adaptation evolved by the organism in response to its own emergency overreaction and dyscontrol (sic.) (Rado, 1969, pp. 212-213; emphasis added).

According to Drescher (2002), Rado's adaptational model of sexuality and by extension of homosexuality dominated American psychiatry until a year after his death in 1972. Rado's theories of parental psychopathology as the cause of a homosexuality were famously put to test by Bieber (1962) in a study that looked at 106 homosexual men in psychoanalytic treatment to identify family patterns believed to be the cause of homosexuality. Bieber and his team claimed that of

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example of such strategic appropriation of Freudian legacy.

the 106 homosexual men who took part in the study 29 had become ‘exclusively heterosexual’ during the course of psychoanalytic treatment (p. 276). The premise from which Bieber and his colleagues worked was simple: ‘We assume that heterosexuality is the biologic norm and that unless interfered with all individuals are heterosexual’ (ibid. p. 319). The conclusions they reached were seen to support that view:

‘We consider homosexuality to be a pathologic biosocial, psychosexual adaptation consequent to pervasive fears surrounding the expression of heterosexual impulses. In our view, every homosexual is, in reality, a ‘latent’ heterosexual (Bieber, 1962, p. 220).

At around the same time as Bieber’s study, Socarides, reworking Freud’s theory, claims that homosexuality is a neurotic disorder in which the libidinal instinct has

undergone excessive transformation and disguise in order to be gratified in the perverse act. The perverted action, like the neurotic symptom, results from the conflict between the ego and the id and represents a compromise formation which at the same time must be acceptable to the demands of the superego... the instinctual gratification takes place in disguised form while its real content remains unconscious (Socarides, 1968, pp. 35-36).

Socarides’ theory is significant inasmuch as it enables homosexuality to meet the psychoanalytic definition of an illness, because for Socarides and his followers, ‘homosexuality is now defined as a compromise between intrapsychic forces’ (Drescher, 2002, p. 13) Once again, family relations and parental influence are deemed decisive factors in fostering homosexuality in boys: ‘The family of the homosexual is usually a female-dominated environment wherein the father was absent, weak, detached or sadistic’ (Socarides, 1968, p. 38).

### **3.3.2 RT in the US post 1973**

Following in a long-established – and never disproven – psychodynamic tradition, reparative therapists see SSA [Same Sex Attraction] as a symbolic defense against the trauma of attachment loss (Nicolosi, 2009a).

Early reparative therapists’ work notwithstanding, in 1973 homosexuality was removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). This event has

marked a slow move away from perceiving heterosexuality as the only norm, and towards a more flexible and inclusive view of human sexuality, of which homosexuality is just one expression (APA, 2008).<sup>63</sup> At the same time, all its members did not unequivocally accept APA's decision, and thus, the 'modern' era of reparative therapy began. With time, professional bodies in the United States began increasingly to embrace non-discriminatory policies and practices: American Psychiatric Association issued its first anti-discrimination statement in December 1973; the American Academy of Psychoanalysis issued a similar statement in 1990 and a year later the American Psychoanalytic Association followed suit (Drescher, 2002, p. 39). Under these new circumstances reparative therapists officially no longer had the backing of professional bodies to work with adults towards sexual re-orientation and it has become progressively more difficult to maintain the aura of scientific professionalism that characterized much of their work before 1973. As a result RT practitioners became professionally marginalized and what followed was 'the evolution of reparative therapist from medically concerned practitioners into antigay political activists' who 'have moved away from psychoanalytical center and have been embraced by conservative religious and political forces' openly opposed to homosexuality (Drescher, 2002, p. 19).

In response to changes in the society and in the scientific perception of homosexuality therapists who continued to offer RT were effectively forced to establish their own organizations to support and promote their now outdated views and methods. In 1992 Nicolosi and Socarides cofounded the National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH). NARTH constitutes one of the most prominent and the largest (it claims to have over 1000 members) institutions devoted to reparative therapy in the US today. Its founder's, Nicolosi's, work is of particular interest, as it can be said to bring a

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<sup>63</sup> What is also important to note here is that removal of homosexuality from the list of mental disorders was followed in 1980 by the introduction of a new diagnosis: gender identity disorder (GID), which was classified as a condition marked by a pronounced cross-gender identification, a disparity between anatomical sex and gender identity, that is considered most treatable in children and young people (Koh, 2012). For Eve Sedgwick (1993) GID enabled revisionist psychoanalysis to focus on effeminate boys making them the new focus of degradation. Also for Butler (2004) GID has largely become the means to 'prevent' homosexuality in children and safeguard the heteronormative order; she does however acknowledge that it is useful inasmuch as it enables trans-identified individuals to obtain financial assistance for sex-reassignment treatment or surgery and to apply for a legal change in gender status.

new style and content to RT denoting an important shift in the RT literature, explicitly combining spiritual and psychoanalytic elements, as illustrated in the below extract from his book:

Each one of us, man and woman alike, is driven by the power of romantic love. These infatuations gain their power from the unconscious drive to become a complete human being. In heterosexuals, it is the drive to bring together the male-female polarity through the longing for the other-than me. But in homosexuals, it is the attempt to fulfill a deficit in wholeness of one's original gender (Nicolosi, 1991; pp. 109-110).

Increasingly, religious dogma becomes fused with psychoanalytical jargon to deliver a message predicated upon rejection of homosexuality grounded in a Judeo-Christian understanding of the human nature and, by extension, sexuality:

Biological influences may indeed influence some people toward homosexuality (...) but none of these factors mean that homosexuality is normal and a part of human *design*, or that it is inevitable in such people, or that it is unchangeable (NARTH, 2013; emphasis added).

The Judeo-Christian concept of humanity and traditional psychodynamic psychology share the same understanding: the concept that human nature is supposed to "function according to its *design*." [They] both envision humankind as part of a universal heterosexual natural order (Nicolosi, 2009b; emphasis added).

That homosexuality is against this *natural* order becomes the unquestionable ideological basis on which RT now rests; what remains to be done is to investigate its causes and to cure it. As mentioned in Chapter 1, for Nicolosi homosexuality becomes a deficit in masculine identity in need of repair (Nicolosi, 2009b).

At the same time, in looking for the causes of homosexuality contemporary RT practitioners draw on the work done by their predecessors and parental influence is high on the list of possible triggers for Same Sex Attraction (SSA). According to Nicolosi:

[Regarding the causes of homosexuality] recent political pressure has resulted in a denial of the importance of the factor most strongly implicated by decades of previous clinical research - developmental factors, particularly the influence of parents (Nicolosi, 2015a).

However, the list of what causes homosexuality goes beyond parental failures and the one published by International Healing Foundation (IHF) is worth citing in its entirety, as it illustrates both the potential for maneuver that contemporary

RT theorists give themselves in diagnosing the causes of homosexuality, as well as the high levels of moral panic in which seemingly innocent situations and conditions are seen as ‘conducive’ to homosexuality:

As the APA [American Psychological Association] stated, there is no particular factor or factors that determine sexual orientation; however, through 21 years of clinical practice, we have observed that men and women who experience SSA often share similar background:

1. Heredity
  - Unresolved family issues
  - Predilection for rejection
2. Temperament
  - Hypersensitivity
  - Artistic nature
  - Gender non-conforming behaviors
3. Hetero-Emotional Wounds
  - Over attachment to opposite-sex parent
  - Imitation of opposite-sex behavior
4. Homo-Emotional Wounds
  - Detachment from same-gender parent
  - Experience of being neglected/abused
5. Sibling Wounds/Family Dynamics
  - Name calling
  - Abuse: physical, emotional, mental
6. Body Image Wounds
  - Thinner/Heavier
  - Shorter/Taller
  - Late bloomer
  - Physical disabilities
7. Sexual Abuse
  - Early sexualization
  - Learned and reinforced behaviors
  - Substitute for affection and love
8. Homo-Social/Peer Wounds
  - Teacher’s pet
  - Boys: no rough and tumble
  - Girls: too much rough and tumble
9. Cultural Wounds
  - Early exposure to sexuality through Internet, media, and educational institutions
  - Pornography
10. Other Factors
  - Divorce
  - Death of a caregiver
  - Adoption
  - Religious wounding (International Healing Foundation, 2015)

Besides the clear message that just about anything can ‘cause’ homosexuality, the list conveys a not so subtle judgment on what is acceptable in terms of gender roles (boys need to play rough) and family organization (divorce is bad) as well as reinforcing the idea that homosexuality is caused by trauma, abuse and neglect. The focus of reparative therapy is to revert the damage done by

these factors and to help individuals reconnect with their ‘true’, heterosexual selves. According to IHF, this not only heals the homosexuals but also the societies they live in, as proposed in IHF’s goal: ‘Our goal is to promote healthy individuals and relationships, while assisting in the healing of families, communities, and places of worship’ (International Healing Foundation, 2014).

### **3.3.3 Main challenges to and critique of RT**

Overall, there are two major concerns about conversion therapy. First, conversion therapies are regarded as ethically questionable in meeting psychologists’ obligation to protect consumer welfare and to meet one’s own professional responsibilities. Second, there is virtually no empirical evidence supporting the efficacy of these techniques (Halpert, 2000, p. 21).

Unsurprisingly, in the US, writings that critique and dismiss RT outright are plentiful. A significant number of scholarly articles focus on the ethical aspects of RT, or rather violation of ethical standards that RT is thought to exemplify (see for example Haldeman, 1994; Halpert, 2000; Jenkins & Johnston, 2004). Thus Jenkins and Johnston (2012) note, that: ‘The ethical breach by practitioners is twofold: (a) promising clients change in their sexual orientation; and (b) portraying all gay men and lesbians as unhappy, miserable, and without hope’ (p. 560). For Ginicola and Smith (2011, p. 317), RT is unethical on the basis of not meeting the criteria of ‘beneficence’, exhibiting ‘lack of scientific basis for treatment’, practicing ‘outside boundaries of competence’ as well as because it perpetuates ‘historical and social prejudice’. Consequently, RT has been discussed as potentially harmful to individuals:

[C]lients need to be told that reparative therapies may have no effect or harmful effects, including depression, anxiety, and self-destructive behavior. Treatment might not mean recovery from homosexuality, as reparative therapists would have clients believe. Instead it might require recovery from reorientation therapy itself. Clients may have to recuperate from the "toxic effects of the shame and guilt" brought about by being told that "homosexuality is a state of arrested psychological development or a moral insufficiency" (Haldeman, 2001, p. 121).

Moreover, RT’s increasingly explicit reliance on religious dogma has furthered its marginalization from the scientific core it once was part of and as a result, RT practitioners have been critiqued as thinly disguised theologians whose task is to assert that gender differences are divinely created and ordained (Robinson & Spivey, 2007). Accordingly, the theory that RT rests on has been described as

‘religious cum scientific paradigm’ in which ‘mental health is defined as conformity to traditional values and norms’ (Drescher, 2002, p. 35). Thus, it has been argued that in the ‘pseudo-medical science’ of reparative therapy ‘there is no homosexual subject, just an object to be first psychosexually and morally defiled then treated and cured’ (Grace, 2008, p. 573). Institutions like NARTH have been branded as evangelical conservative constituencies and their outlook on homosexuality as well as their aims and methods have been discussed in terms of their close affiliation to, and being an important part of, the Christian Right movement in the US (Buss, 2003; S. Hunt, 2009, pp. 2-3).<sup>64</sup>

In addition, some scholars have highlighted and critiqued the prevalent male bias of RT (Bright, 2004; Mondimore, 1996). Bright points out that RT practitioners have ‘consistently kept their focus exclusively on male homosexuals. Lesbians, bi-sexual, and transgender persons are rarely, if ever, mentioned in the reparative therapy literature’ (Bright, 2004, p. 476). Such bias is attributed to the rigid views of gender norms and roles with an emphasis on male sexuality rooted in phallogocentric view of human sexuality and investments in traditional patriarchal hierarchies (Mondimore, 1996). Similarly, some authors have pointed out the ways in which RT has also largely overlooked power relationships of race and class focusing largely on white, middle class subjects (Beckstead, 2002).

Furthermore, concerns have been raised around the potential scope for exploitation that follows from the fact that many RT organizations have a not-for-profit or religious status and are therefore exempt from paying taxes in the US (Halpert, 2000). Related to this point, criticism has also been leveled at the lack of professional accountability of RT providers:

To exacerbate the potential harm done to naive, shame-ridden counselees, many of these [sexual conversion] programs operate under the formidable auspices of the Christian church, and outside the jurisdiction of any professional organization that might impose ethical standards of practice and accountability on them (Haldeman quoted in Cianciotto & Cahill, 2006, p. 72)

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<sup>64</sup> The Christian Right is understood here as defined by Herman (2000) as ‘a broad coalition of [religious] organizations that have come together to struggle for their socio-political vision in the public sphere. These organizations, and their activist leaders, are... committed to a conservative... Protestant Christianity’ (p. 140); at the same time, some scholars have used the term New Christian Right to describe this phenomenon (Beyer, 1994)

The unregulated economic character and often hefty fees charged for RT in the US (which can amount to thousands of dollars) have also come under critical scrutiny (Halpert, 2000, p. 29).

Overall, the controversies that surround RT resulted in publications such as *Just the Facts about Sexual Orientation and Youth* published by the American Psychiatric Association and endorsed by all the mainstream health and mental health professional organizations in the US. *Just the Facts* defines reparative therapy as based on ‘questionable’ scientific ground and as potentially harmful on the basis that its source lies in the conviction that homosexuality is a mental disorder and its a priori assumption that the patient should change his/her sexual orientation (APA, 2008). In 2012 the American Psychoanalytic Association issued a statement that reasserted:

Psychoanalytic technique does not encompass purposeful attempts to “convert,” “repair,” change or shift an individual’s sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Such directed efforts are against fundamental principles of psychoanalytic treatment and often result in substantial psychological pain by reinforcing damaging internalized attitudes (American Psychoanalytic Association, 2012).

Moreover, opposition to RT has brought about a series of attempts to regulate who can legally receive RT in the US, with particular focus on preventing young people from receiving RT. In August 2013 a Court of Appeals found the Californian state law barring gay conversion therapy for minors legal (Elias, 2013). In December 2014 a 17-year-old transgender girl, Leelah Alcorn, committed suicide leaving an online suicide note in which she blamed religious RT practitioners for trying to convert her back to being a boy. In response to this tragedy a petition was started: *Enact Leelah's Law to Ban All LGBTQ+ Conversion Therapy*. The petition was met with wide public support in the US and over 120,000 people signed it. As a result, in April 2015, president Barack Obama responding to the petition issued a statement calling for the end of therapies aiming to ‘repair’ gay, lesbian and transgender youth. At the same time, Obama did not explicitly call for legislation on a federal level; rather he promised his support for state level legislations that would ban RT for young people (Shear, 2015). By September 2017 a total of nine states have introduced legislation banning reparative therapy for minors (Movement Advancement



Project, 2017). Whether more change in legislation will follow remains to be seen.

Finally, RT in the US has also faced many challenges from within, particularly since the turn of the century. In 2000, John Paulk, one of the movement's poster boys was photographed in a gay bar in Washington D.C., as a result he was forced to resign from two prominent ex-gay organizations, Exodus International and Focus on the Family (Cianciotto and Cahill 2007).<sup>65</sup> More recently, Paulk issued the following statement:

For the better part of 10 years, I was an advocate and spokesman for what's known as the 'ex-gay movement,' where we declared that sexual orientation could be changed through a close-knit relationship with God, intensive therapy and strong determination... At the time, I truly believed that it would happen. And while many things in my life did change as a Christian, my sexual orientation did not (Morgan, 2013).

In June 2013, Exodus International closed down and its former president, Alan Chambers, issued an apology in which he said he believed reparative therapy is damaging, and that the organization "did a disservice" (Signorile, 2013). Nevertheless, despite the internal crises and some (minor) legal setbacks, RT in the US is still very much alive and kicking. Moreover, RT groups have reframed their work in the language of rights, stressing individual's right to choose RT, a point that I will briefly discuss next.

### **3.3.4 Right to therapy and our science is more scientific than your science**

The Alliance [NARTH] remains committed to protecting the rights of clients with unwanted same-sex attractions to pursue change as well as the rights of clinicians to provide such psychological care (NARTH Institute, 2015d).

In response to the many criticisms leveled at RT practitioners and theorists in the US, the latter began to repackage their opposition to homosexuality in the language of rights and tolerance for difference. As a result, the essentialist understanding of gender and sexuality is presented as one choice among many that must be respected in a pluralist society that is open to a range of opinions and beliefs:

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<sup>65</sup> Paulk is the co-author of *Love Won Out: How God's Love Helped Two People Leave Homosexuality and Find Each Other*, which he wrote with his ex-wife, Anne, in 1999.

Philosophically, I am an essentialist - not a social constructionist: I believe that gender identity and sexual orientation are grounded in biological reality... The belief that humanity is designed for heterosexuality has been shaped by age-old religious and cultural forces, which must be respected as a welcome aspect of intellectual diversity (Nicolosi, 2015b).

Recognizing their position as traditionalist, yet still insisting on its scientific validity RT proponents now demand tolerance for their worldview:

"Tolerance and diversity" means nothing if it is extended to [LGBTQ] activists and not traditionalists on the homosexual issue. Tolerance must also be extended to those people who take the principled, scientifically supportable view that homosexuality works against our human nature (NARTH Institute, 2015c).

Similarly, people's choice of RT is clothed in the language of freedom and agency as exercised in the right to attempt to change one's sexual orientation:

The Alliance [NARTH] respects each client's dignity, autonomy and free agency. We believe that clients have the right to claim a gay identity, or to diminish their homosexuality and to develop their heterosexual potential. The right to seek therapy to change one's sexual adaptation should be considered self-evident and inalienable (NARTH Institute, 2015c).

What is telling about such framing of RT is the way it is presented as an equally valid option to claiming one's gay identity; an option now clothed in the language of rights and freedoms that can be chosen by autonomous agentive individuals. Importantly, scholars who are critical of RT have responded to such reframing of the practice pointing out that a client's request for reparative therapy must be questioned in the context of the level to which autonomy of RT clients may be eroded by internalized, cultural, and therapist's homophobia (Grace, 2008).

Moreover, given the progress of gay and lesbian rights, RT proponents have found themselves on the defensive and now call for protection from the very laws that aim to protect gays and lesbians from harm, as illustrated by [SameSexAttraction.org](http://SameSexAttraction.org), (a website that is linked to NARTH and that appears to function primarily as an information bank about existing RT groups):

All branches of government should avoid actions or decisions that would inhibit free speech about, or the practice of, freely chosen alternatives to homosexuality. Of particular concern are laws regarding hate crimes and sexual orientation that may be construed to make it illegal to promote or even speak about alternatives to homosexuality ([SameSexAttraction.org](http://SameSexAttraction.org), 2015a).

Yet another way RT groups responded to their marginalization from mainstream scientific debate has been to reverse the discourse and point out first the, in their view, unscientific character of APA's ruling to remove homosexuality from the manual of mental disorders and then the biased nature of every ruling that have furthered the cause of sexual minorities' equality. The NARTH website has a separate section that deals specifically with its relationship to APA (NARTH Institute, 2015b). For instance, APA's resolution on lesbian and gay parenting that stresses amongst other points that 'there is no *scientific* evidence that parenting effectiveness is related to parental sexual orientation: lesbian and gay parents are as likely as heterosexual parents to provide supportive and healthy environments for their children' (American Psychological Association, 2004; emphasis added) is met with the following response from a NARTH member:

Indeed, the evidence is clear that in the case of the APA resolutions on homosexual marriage and parenting, APA has indeed catered to as small but vocal special-interest group and has allowed *activism to masquerade as science*. If the resolutions are allowed to stand, scientific groups such as NARTH must make a concerted effort to surface the issues to state legislatures in order *to preserve psychology as a science* (Byrd, 2015; emphasis added).

At the same time groups such as NARTH have been paying close attention and responding to global developments, and when the World Medical Association (WMA) (2013) issued a statement in which it is clearly stated that 'homosexuality is a natural variation of human sexuality without any intrinsically harmful health effects', NARTH's president responded accusing WMA of lack of scientific integrity and of 'providing conclusions that are no more supportable than speculation' (Rosik, 2015).

Finally, as already signaled, and also noted by some scholars, whereas originally aimed at adult homosexuals, in the new millennium RT practitioners began to increasingly target parents, children and youth with the aim to 'prevent' the development of homosexuality (Cianciotto & Cahill, 2006). The previously mentioned efforts by people and organizations that oppose RT to introduce legislative measure that would curb availability of RT to young people can thus also be seen as a response to this trend.

### 3.3.5 RT's global aspirations

Despite some setbacks suffered on the home front, American RT organizations continue to actively seek new markets to promote their ideology and the ambition towards reaching a global audience is one of their most a prevailing features. These global aspirations are for instance manifested through NARTH's international division, The International Federation for Therapeutic Choice (IFTC):

The International Federation for Therapeutic Choice (IFTC) is Alliance's [NARTH's] international division formed to give a greater voice to therapists, academics, and interested individuals located outside the United States who are members of the Alliance for Therapeutic Choice and Scientific Integrity (NARTH Institute), and to defend the rights of therapists to treat unwanted homosexuality throughout the world (NARTH Institute, 2015a).

The same website provides a links to resources on 'unwanted same sex attraction' in 31 different languages (including links to *Odwaga* and *Pascha* in Poland) and NARTH Institute's Practice Guidelines in Chinese, French, German, Italian, Polish, Russian, and Spanish (NARTH Institute, 2015a).<sup>66</sup>

Notwithstanding the closing down of Exodus International – whose activities were restricted to North America – it is business as usual for Exodus Global Alliance (Exodus Global Alliance, 2013) an international umbrella organization for reparative therapy groups around the world. Exodus' website provides a multitude of resources, including articles, books, video tutorials and translations into eleven languages (Exodus Global Alliance, 2015). Similarly, Thomas Aquinas Psychological Clinic's website (owned and run by Nicolosi) boasts a list of international training seminars given around the globe (including Poznań, Poland in 2011) and a list of languages (again including Polish) Nicolosi's books have been translated into (Thomas Aquinas Psychological Clinic, 2015). On the People Can Change website one can choose to view the entire contents in either English, German, Hebrew or Polish (People Can Change, 2015). Consequently, it is clear that US RT groups make a conscious effort to reach a global and also Polish audience. Such manifestations of international links and presence become a way to signal respectability and

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<sup>66</sup> The webpage also informs that you can order a copy of Richard Cohen's book *Coming Out Straight: Understanding and Healing Homosexuality* translated into Polish.

supposed recognition of organizations and individuals. At the same time providing translations and links to non-US organizations represent conscious efforts to advertise the endeavor of RT beyond the US. As of today, there is not much academic research on RT as a global phenomenon, even though some scholars mention reparative therapy groups in their analyses of the involvement of the North American Christian Right in debates on homosexuality in Africa, in particular in Uganda, Malawi and South Africa (Kaoma, 2009, 2010; Sekinelgin, 2012; Valentine, Vanderbeck, Sadgrove, & Andersson, 2013).<sup>67</sup> In the introduction I have briefly discussed the ways in which RT was introduced to Poland via series of seminars and lectures delivered by RT practitioners from the US. Even though this thesis does not explicitly focus on the global spread of RT, mapping out the ways in which this phenomenon has travelled and taken new forms in a different environment, in Poland, can contribute to the understanding of the former.

### **3.4. Concluding remarks**

In this chapter I have provided an overview of the two separate contexts relevant to my study. Consequently, I have discussed the situation of LGBT persons in Poland, both historically, under the previous regime, and contemporarily, paying particular attention to the emergence and development of the Polish LGBT movement and the challenges it faced over the last three decades. I then gave an overview of RT as a phenomenon that originated and developed in the US, discussing both the critiques of the practice and the way US-based RT organizations responded to these; the ways in which these are consequential for the framing, promotion and contestation of RT in Poland is something I will return to later on in this thesis. Finally, I briefly discussed the global aspirations of US RT groups, which can also be seen as exemplified by the spread of RT to Poland following the fall of state socialism. Before I move on with my analysis of the empirical sites contextualized above, the next chapter offers and in depth discussion of the methods deployed in this study.

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<sup>67</sup> The context in which RT is promoted in Africa is different to the interventions that have taken place in Poland. One important difference being the denominational divide that does not exist in Africa, where local Anglican Churches cooperate with and very often rely on funding from the Anglican Churches in the US (Valentine, Vanderbeck, Sadgrove and Andersson, 2013; Kaoma, 2009; Kaoma 2012).

## **Chapter 4: Researching Reparative Therapy and the LGBT movement in Poland**

### **4.1. Introduction**

This study addresses the question of what are the ways in which processes of neoliberalization (as exemplified by individualization, commodification and the expansion of the market into ever more spheres of life) shape the grassroots politics of sexuality in contemporary Poland and how differences of class, gender, and location position subjects differently within the landscape of the latter. Addressing an existing theoretical as well as empirical research gap, my investigation focuses on two largely understudied sites: Christian LGBT organizing and religiously motivated Reparative Therapy (RT). In terms of methods, this project relies on a mixed qualitative approach, combining content and discourse analysis with semi-structured in depth interviews, one focus group interview and a survey that all the interviewees were asked to fill out directly before the interviews (see Appendix 1). In this chapter I discuss my methodological approach, the type and scope of the data analyzed and the process of its production as well as some of the methodological challenges faced. In addition, in the final section of this chapter I offer some thoughts on questions of ethics, reflexivity and epistemological considerations. The chapter ends with a short discussion of issues related to translation.

Before I move on to discussing these matters, it is important to note that a range of theoretical tensions accompanied this study from the outset and as the project has progressed several shifts occurred that contributed to its final form. This might not be immediately evident in terms of the actual methods deployed – from the outset in-depth interviews were the most appropriate method to explore the questions this study addresses – but it did nonetheless influence the study. Importantly, it is reflected in the types of questions asked in the interviews and, to a lesser degree, in the survey. Thus, whilst the initial topic guides were designed to cover a broad range of issues, such an open-ended approach resulted in a very rich set of data, of which only a fraction came to constitute the basis of this thesis. Also, in the process, I redirected my attention to a different set of issues, which grew out of my engagement with the field and my participants. Thus, for instance, my original interest in globalization and the

impact of Europeanization on the situation of LGBT people in Poland led me to prepare a set of questions about these and consequently some of the questions I asked in the interviews were:

- *Comparing to other European countries, how would you rate the level of discrimination LGBT people face in Poland?*
- *Has joining the EU changed anything for Polish LGBT people?*

Yet, as the project progressed and particularly in the period after the fieldwork, the set of concerns that motivated these questions gave place to other commitments that, in retrospect, I felt could have been explored more thoroughly with my interviewees. Hence, if I were to conduct the same interviews again, I would have narrowed down the scope of the questions to closer match the new set of theoretical commitments that developed alongside the data analysis. At the same time, it is *through* the data produced and in the process of its production that I came to question and reflect upon the ways in which the politics of sexuality in Poland are influenced by the processes of neoliberalization, a strand of enquiry that has been largely neglected in the existing scholarship. Thus, ultimately, whilst the initial research design did not identify the gaps in the literature that this project effectively aims to address, the research process has been both instructive and productive. In that sense, whilst my project did not take a grounded theory (GT) approach, it resonates with it in certain aspects; on a most basic level ‘GT provides... guidelines that begin with openly exploring and analyzing inductive data and leads to developing a theory grounded in data,’ the process is iterative and characterized by simultaneous collection and analysis of data (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014, p. 2) and is guided by ‘theoretical agnosticism’ (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997) whereby researchers are expected to remain critical of applying theoretical frameworks throughout the research process.<sup>68</sup> The iterative nature of this process makes it possible to try out different theoretical frameworks in search of the one, or the ones, that best explain the issue, or process under scrutiny.

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<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, GT is a broad category that has developed in many directions over the decades since it was first formulated by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in late 1960s and a more useful way of thinking about it is in terms of a family of methods rather than a one unified approach (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014).

Consequently this project took a similar path. The result, rather than being guided by one theoretical approach opened up new avenues of inquiry, which have a potential to inform future studies on the hugely under examined and undertheorized links between neoliberalism, and sexual politics in the postsocialist context, a dimension that I did not anticipate *a priori*.

Moreover, this study is indebted to feminist methodologies in particular of which attention to and acknowledgement of one's own positionality and politics is crucial. This also necessitates capacity to account for the obstacles encountered in the process – both the ones anticipated and those that came as a surprise – and any reroutes taken. Thus, the role of this chapter is to make explicit the process as well as how it was shaped and at times also restricted by the context, its temporality and the researcher behind it.

Finally, analytically, this study is informed by strand of academic inquiry known as intersectional analysis. Intersectional analysis aims to investigate the intersecting patterns between different structures of power and to explore how people position themselves and are unequally positioned in multiple categories, such as gender, race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality (Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006). It was pioneered by the work of Elizabeth V. Spelman (1988) and black feminists in the US, in particular Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991) and Patricia Hill Collins (1993, 1998), who used it to bring their particular situation as both women and people of color into focus in order to challenge the existing power relations and to highlight the complex experience of inequality, where different forms of identification are mutually constitutive. Intersectionality has since been applied to a variety of contexts outside of the US and has become a 'travelling concept' (Knapp, 2005). Just as any analytical framework, intersectionality has its own flaws, and it has been critiqued as overinvested in the process of categorization itself (Christensen & Jensen, 2012). As a result, a need to emphasize processes and relations rather than categories has been proposed, where attention is given to 'racialization more than races, economic exploitation rather than classes, gendering and gender performance rather than genders' (Choo & Ferree, 2010; p.134). There have also been discussions on the number of categories and the tension between endlessly multiplying social categories to avoid erasures and a strategic necessity for selecting some (McCall, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Finally, some



scholars have warned against treating the categories chosen for analysis, i.e. class, gender, and ethnicity, as if they function according to identical logics, as there are significant ontological differences between them (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Bearing in mind that intersectional analysis is difficult to apply, I consider it valuable for the purpose of this study for addressing the ways in which sexuality, class, gender, and location interrelate, and position subjects differently vis-à-vis the demands of contemporary Polish society and how this is reflected in the three empirical sites under scrutiny in this project. In approaching these through the lens of intersectionality this project addresses some of the gaps that exist more generally in the literature on the politics of sexuality in postsocialist contexts – where questions of class are rarely raised in relation to sexuality and/or gender and the influence of neoliberalization on the politics of sexuality is almost entirely overlooked – and more specifically on the Polish LGBT movement, Christian LGBT organizing and RT in Poland.

#### **4.2. Analysis of published data**

As already mentioned this study engages with three separate but linked empirical sites: LGBT movement, RT groups and Christian LGBT organizing in Poland. Whilst a rich body of literature exists on the topic of Polish LGBT organizing, both historically and contemporarily – as discussed in detail in Chapter 3 – the issue of religiously motivated efforts to reorient homosexual desire has gone entirely unnoticed. As such, engaging with the topic required some preliminary research into the phenomenon and that in turn was based on content analysis of a range of non-academic sources. The site of RT in the form that I am concerned with in this study is constituted by three Christian groups – *Odwaga*, *Pascha* and *Pomoc 2002* – and it is their published materials that I analyzed using content analysis.<sup>69</sup> Content analysis is understood here as a

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<sup>69</sup> Initially, I was also interested in a fourth ‘group’ *Nowe Drogi* (New Ways). In May 2015, I contacted the group directly through an email address found on their website, which has since been deactivated. I received a response from a person who referred me on to another individual, who in turn did not respond to my email message, despite several follow up emails. As the study progressed I was unable to reach anyone who would have belonged to *Nowe Drogi*, or would even be aware of the group’s existence; a point worth noting as generally past RT participants were well informed in regards to the RT groups available in Poland. The only

‘qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings’ (Patton, 2002; p.453). Whilst such definition might suggest a very mechanical process, it would be misleading and at odds with feminist methodological approach to present the outcomes of this ‘data reduction and sense-making’ as guided by some kind of detached or serendipitous discovery. Whilst it is true that I kept my analytical framework open and flexible, to accommodate the shifts this study has undergone, the lens through which I read these documents was that of intersectional analysis, with a strong focus on materiality developing in the latter parts of the project. My examination focused on a range of document types summarized in Table 4.1

Table 4.1. RT groups’ documents analyzed

<b>Organization/Type of document</b>	<b>Texts supporting ideological and religious positions</b>	<b>External links and sources quoted</b>	<b>Members’ testimonies</b>
<i>Odwaga</i>	<i>Nasze Podstawy</i> (Our foundations) <i>Witamy na stronach Odwagi</i> (Welcome to Odwaga’s webpages)	<i>Publikacje: przeczytaj – pomyśl – działaj</i> (Publications: read – think – act)	<i>Świadcstwa</i> (Testimonies)
<i>Pascha</i>	<i>Cel grupy</i> (Aim of the group) <i>Program Działania</i> (Plan of action)	<i>Linki</i> (Links)	<i>Świadcstwa i aktualności</i> (Testimonies and news)
<i>Pomoc 2002</i>	<i>Stowarzyszenie</i> (Association) <i>Statut stowarzyszenia POMOC 2002</i> (Statute of Pomoc 2002)	<i>Czytelnia: Homoseksualizm: Artykuły</i> (Reading room: Homosexuality: Articles)	<i>Świadcstwa</i> (Testimonies) <i>Listy</i> (Letters)

Source: Own compilation based on Appendix 5.

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remaining trace of *Nowe Drogi* appears to be a mention on the [homoseksualizm.edu.pl](http://homoseksualizm.edu.pl) portal where the group is referred to as:

‘Warsaw-based group for psychologists, doctors and others, who share the conviction that through Godly support and professional help from people a person can experience a significant change in the quality of their life. Help for people who struggle with unwanted same sex attraction consists of participation in a support group. Separate groups exist for men and women. *Nowe Drogi* also cooperate with psychotherapists who assist in the process of healing’ (Homoseksualizm.edu.pl, 2016).

Whilst I used the first two subtypes to map out the practice and inform the relevant part of my context chapter as well as to guide the questions I asked in the interviews, the last subtype – testimonies of participants – I engaged with analytically in more depth. Together with the data produced through interviews with past members of RT groups these come to serve as a basis for discussion of the individualizing and self-responsibilizing principles RT rests upon in Chapter 6.

In reading these documents I was primarily interested in the ways in which RT groups present themselves to their audience, what their theoretical underpinnings are, and how these are in turn presented. Then each of the RT groups' website was examined for links to other organizations and institutions as well as for sources (books, articles, websites) promoted.

In looking at the online testimonies from RT participants I initially focused on what markers of difference could be distinguished in the texts (gender, age, class, etc.) and also in reemerging patterns, such as accounts of family relations, homosexual experiences, individual responsibility and the way these are framed.

In terms of secondary sources, I analyzed publications by both Polish LGBT organizations and the Polish media that discuss RT. The rationale behind examining these publications was to investigate what perceptions of RT circulate in the public space. Moreover, I examined publications by LGBT rights groups that contest RT to investigate what strategies are applied in such dismissals. This analysis in turn informed the way topic guides were assembled and the questions related to the practice of RT formulated in the interviews with both past participants of RT programmes and LGBT activists.

Finally, to support the analysis of content I used analysis of discourse to 'identify, within a text, institutionally supported and culturally influenced interpretive and conceptual schemas... that produce particular understandings of issues and events', in this case of the practice of RT in Poland (Bacchi, 2006; p. 199). The aim of this approach was to interrogate these schemas in greater depth and to show how they 'operate to delimit an issue in specific ways' (Bacchi, 2006; p. 202). Thus, whilst analysis of content enabled me to draw a mental map of RT, I used discourse analysis to interpret the landscape of the

phenomenon. An example of this two-step approach could be the way in which through content analysis I identified as a reoccurring theme the idea of family (and ‘dysfunctional’ character of the same as a source of homosexuality, i.e. an overprotective mother, distant/absent father). Once I established that such understanding of the family is a central feature within the RT groups’ understanding of human sexuality I could then examine its discursive production and situate it within discourses of family as a heteronormative, stereotypically gendered institution; this analysis is developed in Chapter 6.

### **4.3. Interviews**

The purpose of the interviews was to investigate RT and LGBT organizing (both Christian and mainstream) in Poland through what Dorothy E. Smith refers to as the ‘locally organized practices of actual people’ (Smith, 1999; p. 98). In total this study included 29 participants, of which one withdrew their consent in retrospect resulting in 28. The participants were initially largely recruited through mainstream LGBT organizations and *Wiara i Tęcza* (WiT) with an element of snowballing becoming more pronounced once the fieldwork was already in progress. Consequently, prior to my fieldwork, which took place from June 2015 until April 2016, I emailed seven different LGBT organizations with an invitation to participate in the study on RT and broadly understood LGBT movement in Poland. Six organizations responded and agreed to meet with me. I also repeatedly emailed all three RT groups in question with an invitation to discuss their work, I have however received only two responses and both were negative. Although I have anticipated that RT groups might resist meeting me, I was still surprised that my call for participation was in effect almost entirely ignored. At the same time, some difficulty in recruiting participants running RT groups was to be expected. Thus, not gaining access to this particular group of participants did not derail the project as a whole, even if it did redirect it. Nevertheless, this brings me to one of the biggest methodological challenges of this project, namely recruiting participants with direct experiences of RT groups in Poland and highlights the dissonance that occurred between my initial research design and the situation encountered on the ground. Accounting for the split between the initial design and the final form of this study is a way of making this friction more conspicuous and I

briefly discuss my original plan below before moving on to talk about the process as it occurred.

#### 4.3.1. Initial design

Initially, my aim was to conduct semi-structured qualitative interviews with representatives and participants of RT groups in places where these RT groups operate. In addition, I planned to conduct interviews with representatives of LGBT organizations that operate at these locations. All interviews were to be used to collect new information. Interviews with RT representatives were also to be used for verification of the published material; whilst, interviewing representatives of LGBT groups, in particular, was aimed at triangulation to validate the data produced via interviews with RT groups and participants and the analysis of the published materials. Moreover, honoring my commitment to feminist methodologies the interviews were to be used also to give voice to the people behind the RT groups, give them an opportunity to speak for themselves and represent their own standpoint. Finally, they were also meant to establish whether and how RT as a real life practice might be classed and gendered, and consequently whether it appeals to certain groups of people more than others. From the initial survey of the websites belonging to the three groups that are the focus of this study it was evident that RT as a practice appears to be highly gendered and that it is strongly biased towards a male audience (i.e., through the overrepresentation of male testimonies of success). However, there was no way to establish a priori what other biases might be present, such as class or location (urban/rural). Table 4.2 illustrates the range of themes that I intended to cover in the interviews.

Table 4.2 Planned interview topics overview

Participants	Topics
Representatives of RT organizations	History, scope, aim and structure of the organization Division of labor within the group Type of training received Science behind the RT Promotional activities Links to the local church Demographic of the clients Accessibility of the group.

Participants in RT	Personal details (age, educational and professional background, financial situation, origins, religiosity) Length of involvement with the group Path towards RT Rationale behind joining a group Expectations towards the group Assessment of RT Perception of/experience with LGBTQ organizations in Poland Outness
Representatives of LGBTQ organizations	Size, scope, status and aims of the organization Demographic of the employees Perception and assessment of RT Perception of participants of RT Assessment of LGBTQ activism in Poland (including accessibility) LGBTQ activism and religion

Source: Own compilation.

The aim was to interview *at least one* representative from each of the RT groups in questions as well as minimum two participants per group. In addition, interviews were to be conducted with at least one person from each of the five LGBT organizations that operate in the same locations. Consequently, in total, I was planning to conduct a minimum of seventeen interviews for this study.

#### **4.3.2 Process and final outcome**

As mentioned above, my initial plan to interview people directly involved in running RT groups in Poland turned out to be unfeasible. Whilst there is certainly something to be said about the inefficacy of the almost cold calling nature of my approach to recruiting participants, the time allocated to and scope of the project made other forms of recruitment largely unavailable, considering I had no prior ties to any of these organizations. At the same time, at the outset of this study I was, perhaps too optimistically, committed to giving these groups a possibility to speak for themselves. Consequently, my call for participation, which I sent to all of the RT groups in question, was prepared very carefully in an attempt to present the project as honestly as possible and without deception. As illustrated by the call for participation in Appendix 4, it included such minute adjustments as removing Gender Institute (usually listed above the

School's name) from my signature.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, over the duration of my fieldwork, it became clear that my chances of getting a positive response from the groups in question were practically non-existent. On the one hand the negative media coverage that RT groups experienced in the past – this is particularly true for *Odwaga* and *Pomoc 2002* discussed in Newsweek Polska (2014) and *Po Prostu Program Tomasza Siekielskiego* (2013) respectively – made them suspicious towards *any* external investigation. Thus, it is plausible that they would not agree to meet me even if my call for participation was presented as clearly sympathetic to their ‘cause’, based on their experiences with undercover journalists. On the other hand, in the times of the Internet a quick *Google* search would reveal the details of my institutional affiliation and considering the bad press ‘gender ideology’ was getting in Poland at the time, I would likely be deemed an adversary. This is in the context where ‘gender ideology’ has been demonized as ‘an enemy of the family’, linked to pedophilia and equated with ‘moral chaos’ (see Graff, 2014). Another factor that needs to be accounted for is the sensitive nature of the work RT groups engage in at the intersection of religion and sexuality. Having interviewed people who took part in their programmes, I came to learn that their participation in RT groups more often than not took place in complete secrecy from their families and friends; most frequently the only people who knew about it were participants’ confessors. This need for secrecy meant that at times I was the first person who was not a priest, or a fellow group participant that these men talked to about their experiences. Thus, despite my good intentions and my efforts to make the initial call for participation sound as open as possible I was unlikely to be granted access to organizations that for a range of reasons operate as closed groups, to an extent that – as one of past participants of both *Pascha* and *Pomoc 2002* put it – they have adopted a ‘siege mentality’ (Aleksander, past RT participant, 2015).

On the other hand, considering the level of secrecy and sensitive nature of the topic, I was relatively successful recruiting past RT participants; overall I interviewed eight men who have gone through the programmes of at least one

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<sup>70</sup> At the same time there were certain ‘lines’ that I did not want to cross and thus I could not get myself to write ‘unwanted same sex attraction’ without the inverted commas, as if to do so would be to reproduce the injustice of the practice such framing was inherently based upon.

of the RT groups in question. Over the duration of my fieldwork I had been in direct or indirect (through my interviewees) contact with six more, who refused to take part in the study; the most common reason was a desire ‘to keep the past in the past’, as one person put it and not wanting to revisit the experience. Such refusals pose questions around ethics and responsibility of the researcher towards her participants, both actual and potential. Feminist methodologies stress the need to ‘know responsibly’ to ‘know well’ (Code, 1988, 1995). Thus, whilst this project is committed to producing knowledge that exposes the structural conditions of inequality and how these affect subjectivities, this cannot be achieved through practices that could potentially be harmful to the participants. Consequently, I never pressured potential participants and always took their concerns around the project with the outmost seriousness and respect. This points to the difficulties of negotiating the inherent tensions between knowledge production, speaking for/on behalf of others and giving voice as well as gaining material for potential political transformation of society, and participating in the process of political change .

Furthermore, based on my preliminary research into the workings of the RT groups in Poland I was aware that their services are aimed predominantly at homosexual men. However, in the past *Odwaga* used to run a group for young women and I invested a lot of time and effort to reach its past participants. I was able to come in direct contact with only one woman who had been in *Odwaga*. Unfortunately, she refused to be interviewed arguing – similarly to some of the men who declined my invitation to meet – that she did not want to go back to that painful time in her life. I also sent several email messages to a person who was in charge of running the women’s group in *Odwaga* about a decade ago, but my messages remained unanswered. It is perhaps counterintuitive to perceive the lack of women-orientated RT groups as a sign of gender discrimination, if anything one might wish to celebrate that women do not appear to be a target for RT.<sup>71</sup> Yet, this striking gender imbalance is indicative of larger issues of on one hand the subordinate position of women within Christianity and Catholicism in particular, and on the other hand of invisibility

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<sup>71</sup> This is not to say that RT is not offered to women through other avenues; in fact, the one therapist whom I interviewed who is working and offering RT at a public institution spoke of both female (lesbian) and male (gay) clients they have worked with.



of lesbians within the public space, where homosexual desire is implicitly equated with the figure of a gay man. I return to these questions in the analytical chapters of this thesis.

At the same time, as the project progressed it became clear that the participant-categories that I outlined at the start deviated from and/or overlapped in ways that I did not always anticipate. For example, one of the past RT participants whom I interviewed was effectively involved in running of the local group, which in a way made him both a ‘client’ and a ‘provider’, as he was for instance responsible for accepting new members into the group. Also, there were past participants of RT who are now LGBT activists and members of WiT who are also LGBT activists, making it hard to draw lines between the ‘types’ of participants I was working with. The difficulty with assigning categories to individuals has been theorised well in Vanessa May’s analysis (2010) of the category of ‘lone mother’, where she critiques the use of the category as unified, but also points to the way it can be useful for making pragmatic political claims to address the inequalities faced by lone mothers. Thus, any categorization that a researcher commits to is bound to be porous and comes to serve as a heuristic device rather than a basis for identifying others in any definite ways.

Moreover, other new participant-categories emerged that at times, consisted of one participant only, as was the case for a therapist offering RT within a public mental health institution, unaffiliated with any of the three groups in question. Where possible (without compromising my participants’ anonymity) I try to account for such complexities, as they are relevant for thinking about the ways in which research with human participants is rarely linear and how it requires constant renegotiation of the ways in which we narrate other people’s stories and produce knowledge about others. Finally, the largest group of participants turned out to be members of WiT, a group, which I did not initially intend to work with. This was also the group for which the snowball effect was the greatest – including a nationwide call for participation that was shared by one of the participants on the group’s closed forum – and one that I am most indebted to, as its members have proven very generous and supportive of my project.

The group’s investment in the project is understandable, considering that their work as in the case of RT groups happens at the intersection of religion

and sexuality, but takes a very different stand on the latter (as will be discussed in Chapter 5). Considering the rather closely-knit fabric of the group, it was at times very difficult to negotiate and maintain participants' anonymity, as my interviewees would frequently try to guess whom I had and whom I had not met and what the people they imagined I had met would have said and at times also what they should have said. The following story illustrates this point further. In October 2015, I travelled to a conference on sexualities in Central and Eastern Europe that took place at Central European University in Budapest, Hungary. On the first day, I met a group of Polish scholars, when I introduced myself I was greeted with the following remark: 'So you are the person who has been snooping around WiT!' As it happened, one of the scholars had been working on a project that included members of WiT, who had been discussing my arrival and activities with them. However anecdotal this story might appear; it is of significance as it signals the very real difficulties in ensuring anonymity and confidentiality of the participants in an environment when information travels fast and often in unexpected directions. It is partially because of this that I chose to double the pseudonyms of my participants in certain instances, of which I expand on below.

#### **4.3.3. Interviews – practicalities**

This study was made possible by the participation of 29 individuals who devoted on average three hours of their time to take part in an interview, or a focus group interview in case of six members of WiT. One participant withdrew their consent a couple of days after they had been interviewed and to comply with their wish the interview recording was deleted and all physical documents including the signed consent form and completed survey destroyed, they are also not included in any of the figures below. The person did not provide any reason for the change of mind on the matter of their participation.

I interviewed members of the following LGBT organizations: *Wiara i Tęcza*, *Kampania Przeciw Homofobii*, *Lambda Warszawa*, *Tęczówka*, *Fabryka Równości*, *Tolerado*. In the interest of preserving anonymity of the participants, exact numbers are not stated per each organization. These organizations are often small enough for all members to know each other and for other LGBT activists in Poland to know them through shared professional networks. Also,

more than one participant from the LGBT activist group interviewed belongs to both WiT and another LGBT organization, yet, again, to state which ones do, would potentially compromise the anonymity of the participants in question; an issue even more pressing considering the relatively small milieu of LGBT activists in Poland. Similarly, some members of the organizations listed above have gone through RT programmes, but in the interest of preserving their anonymity they were given different pseudonyms when they are being quoted speaking about their involvement in an LGBT organization and/or WiT and when they are cited accounting their experiences in RT groups. In total, I interviewed 8 men who were members of RT group in the past. Of the total 28 participants, 15 were men (including one trans man) and 13 were women; 12 identified as homosexual men, 9 identified as lesbians, 3 identified as straight, 2 identified as bisexual men, 1 identified as bisexual woman, one did not specify.<sup>72</sup>

All interviews were conducted in Poland, where I was based throughout my fieldwork. The majority of the interviews took place in big cities including Warsaw, Lublin, Łódź, Poznań, Gdańsk, Olsztyn and Katowice (see Appendix 6 for a map of Poland). Two interviews were conducted in smaller cities – one took place in the Silesia region and the second one in a satellite town of Warsaw – yet again for the purpose of preserving anonymity of the participants these towns are not named. All participants were interviewed in a city/town where they live and/or work with two exceptions of two Kraków based participants whom I met in Warsaw as they independently suggested meeting me whilst on business or personal visits to the capital. The locations ranged from participants' homes (when that was deemed safe – based on previous contact with the participant or their social network), through cafes, restaurants and offices. On one occasion the interview took place outdoors, in a park outside of the iconic Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw, as after having tried two cafes the participant did not feel comfortable enough to give the interview at either and suggested we stay outside; luckily, it was a warm summer day and the weather allowed for it. Another time an interview was conducted in a car whilst the participant was driving to and from a short

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<sup>72</sup> This classification reflects how the participants self-identified during the interviews.

meeting. At all times priority was given to mine and my participants' safety and comfort. In all cases, at least one person knew my whereabouts and I always called them after the interview to confirm that I am okay. Regardless of the safety mechanism in place, not once during the entire fieldwork did I feel unsafe or threatened in any way.

The actual times of meetings were decided based on participants' schedules and often included evenings and/or weekends as all of the participants were in full employment or full time students at the time of the interviews. The first interview took place in late June 2015, whilst the last one was at the end of February 2016.

The language of the interviews was Polish and all participants were native Polish speakers. As already mentioned, all interviews except for one were recorded and transcribed. Extracts of the transcribed interviews were then translated into English; I return to the issue of translation in the later part of this chapter.

Prior to the interview, participants were provided with a written document entitled *Arkusz informacyjny* (Information Sheet) about the study (Appendix 2). This information was emailed to participants before the meeting and also given in printed form at the beginning of each meeting.<sup>73</sup> At the start of each meeting I also gave my participants a printed Consent Form (Appendix 3) to sign. This form asked the participants to confirm that they have read and understood the *Information Sheet* given and specifically that their participation in the study is voluntary, they have a right to withdraw from the study at any point or refuse to answer a specific question without having to justify their decision to do so and that all data produced will be made anonymous. It also reminded the participants that they have a right to ask questions about the study. The consent form also contained a separate section that pertained to audio recording of the interview where the participants would tick a box if they agreed to the interview being recorded. All participants except for one consented to the interview being audio-recorded.<sup>74</sup> Finally, the last section of the form advised

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<sup>73</sup> In the case of focus group interview the Information Sheet was only provided in print at the beginning of the meeting, as until the very last moment it was unclear who is going to attend the meeting and the person who organized it on WiT's end was not actually going to attend.

<sup>74</sup> The participant who wished not to be recorded stated that the recording would make them feel less at ease and that would in turn make it harder for them to discuss their experiences and

the participants that if they wish to be informed of the results of the study, they should leave an email address to which a summary of the results could be sent in the future; all but one participant left their email addresses on the form.

The interviews lasted from one to three hours; however, the entire duration of each meeting was not audio recorded. I started each interview by asking the participant to read the *Information Sheet* and sign the *Consent Form* before asking them to fill out the survey. After each of these I gave my participants an opportunity to ask questions. I would then ask if they were ready to proceed to the recorded part of the meeting, once they confirmed they were I would start the recorder. After each interview, again I asked whether there were any questions my interviewees wanted to ask me. On several occasions we stayed on chatting and if my participants would say anything I thought was interesting or provided new information I would ask them if I can write it down and use it. I ended each meeting by reminding the participants that they can email or phone me, should they remember anything else they want to add, or have any further questions.

Finally, the focus group interview was conducted with six members of WiT. It was suggested and organized by one of my participants. Not having done focus group interviews before, I spent several days reading up on how to best structure and moderate one. The main adjustment from individual interviews was the number of questions asked; it was limited to eight from over 20 to ensure there was enough time for each participant to engage with the questions. All participants were given the *Information Sheet* and were also asked to sign the *Consent Form* before I asked them to fill out the survey. Once this has been done we proceeded to the recorded part of the meeting. Whilst initially, the participants seemed shy to talk, they eventually ‘warmed up’ and began to also respond to each other’s comments as well as answering the questions posed. My role was thus limited to that of a moderator who makes sure all voices are heard and that one person does not dominate the discussion.

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views; they then suggested that they would prefer ‘to just chat’. In compliance with the wish of the participant I took written notes instead, however, having done more than a dozen of interviews by then all of which had been recorded, I was overwhelmed at how hard it was to take notes, ask questions and fully pay attention to the answers of the participant. As a result, I was left with the sense of having missed out on parts of what the participant was saying and many ambiguous shortcut notes. The resultant material was significantly less comprehensive in comparison to the transcribed interviews and it ended up being very much underutilized.

Whilst some participants spoke more than others all have contributed to the discussion, which continued well over the scheduled two hours. Moreover, the focus group interview was also useful as it allowed me to meet some of the more rank and file of WiT, as opposed to local group leaders and people who engage in broadly understood activism. This in turn was valuable for thinking through the demographic profile of the group as a whole as well as getting a better sense of the group's structures and activities on the ground.

#### **4.3.4. Survey: design, advantages and shortcomings**

In addition, as part of the interview each participant was asked to fill out a survey (Appendix 1) entitled *Dane biograficzne uczestniczki/uczestnika* (Biographical data of the participant). The main purpose of the survey was to map out the socio-economic context of the participants based on information pertaining to their economic, cultural and – to a lesser extent – social capital, to borrow Pierre Bourdieu's classification (Bourdieu, 1986). Whilst the interviews focused mainly on questions related to broadly understood sexuality and politics of sexuality in contemporary Poland, the survey was to speak more closely to the ways in which the lives of my participants might be marked by class, gender and location differences. At the same time, as Bev Skeggs' (2004) states, 'sexuality... can be added to the means by which class difference could be known and understood' and historically, 'sex, gender and race difference were the means by which class came to be known, spoken, experienced and valued' (p. 37). Thus, my intention was not to separate these categories, but rather to use the survey to contextualize the narratives of my participants.

The survey consisted of 29 questions; these covered areas such as such as income, profession, home ownership, educational attainment, family background (including place of origins and parents' educational attainment), history of migration, frequency with which they engage in a range of cultural practices (including what could be considered 'high' cultural practices such as going to theatres and cultural practices that would fall under 'emerging' cultural capital to borrow Savage et al.'s phrase (Mike Savage et al., 2013), such as for example social media use), holiday habits, membership in organizations, electoral choices and religiosity. Generally, my participants reported no issues filling out the form and all the questions were answered except for two

instances where the question on monthly income was left blank; in the first instance the participant was a full-time student whose parents were still supporting them financially, in the second one they were a professional in a relatively well paid field and a home owner. The advantages of having the survey have turned out to be many with the saving of valuable time that would have otherwise been spent asking question about participants' background being arguably the most evident one.

I have already discussed the issues with examining class in Poland and how class is often dismissed as no longer relevant, or misplaced onto debates that mask its effects (as discussed in Chapter 1), even though its workings are just as relevant (Domański, 2015). I would argue that class is even more relevant today with the processes of neoliberalization resulting in the shrinking of the state and the consequent expansion of the market; a state of affairs that clearly privileges these at the top of the socio-economic ladder. In effect, the language of class in Poland carries certain negative associations that link it back to the socialist regime and my interviews suggest that people generally do not think of themselves in class terms; with an exception of one working class participant who spoke of workers' union and one university lecturer who mentioned class explicitly, class language was entirely absent from the interviews. Yet the data collected through the survey turned out to be particularly informative for my discussion of class pointing to a certain classed character of both LGBT organizing and RT. Notably, having the information on participants' family background enabled a view of intergenerational changes in class positions that would have potentially been obscured otherwise (i.e. if I were to use participants' occupation as a sole marker of class belonging). This in turn revealed some emerging regularities. In the case of past RT participants, the overwhelming majority of interviewees classified as working class educated, denoting a working class family background. In the case of LGBT activists, the majority classified as middle class, again based on their and their parents' socio-economic position in the society.

At the same time the survey results opened up new avenues for thinking about questions of location and in particular the urban/rural divide that has occupied much of the scholarship on LGBT geographies (see the discussion in Chapter 7). Here again participants were asked about their place of origin as

well as their current place of residence, for both they were also asked to specify the size of the place and the region it was located in – this data added a new and unanticipated dimension to my understanding of LGBT organizing in Poland and clearly added to the existing knowledge on the topic.

Nevertheless, in retrospect the survey, as useful as I found it in some aspects, could have been further improved to harness more data. On the one hand, what could have been improved is the multiple-choice question regarding cultural practices. Question 23 (see Figure 4.1 below) reads: *How often do you spend time on the following activities (please tick accordingly)?* The question then goes on to list a range of practices from going to art galleries to watching sports on TV (24 activities in total). Having provided only three options to choose from for frequency of these practices (*Często/Czasami/Nigdy* – Often/Sometimes/Never) resulted in an overwhelming number of ‘Sometimes’ as the answer given. The issue is with the lack of precision and specificity; what classifies as ‘sometimes’ for someone might not necessarily be ‘sometimes’ for another person, depending on the scale applied. As one participant put it very aptly: ‘More than twice in a lifetime is ‘sometimes’, right?’ Thus, a more quantitative approach would be preferable for any future research.

**23. Jak często spędza Pani/Pan czas na poniższych zajęciach (proszę zaznaczyć odpowiednio)?**

	<b>Często</b>	<b>Czasami</b>	<b>Nigdy</b>
<b>Wyjścia:</b>			
▪ Do galerii sztuki, na wystawy, lub do muzeów			
▪ Do opery, filharmonii bądź teatru			
▪ Do kina			
▪ Na koncerty (inne niż muzyki klasycznej)			

Figure 4.1. Survey, question 23; How often do you spend time on the below activities (please tick accordingly)? Going out: To art galleries, exhibitions, or museums; To the opera, philharmonic or theatre; To the cinema; To concerts (other than classical music concerts).



On the other hand, considering that the timing of my fieldwork coincided with the parliamentary elections (November 2015), questions about the electoral choices should have been split into two separate ones: one asking about the 2011 elections and one about the 2015 ones. Having failed to make this distinction, I ended up with some surveys that give response for 2011, some that list both and some that only mention 2015 elections, this is particularly true for interviews conducted in the beginning of 2016. In a two party system, such as in the UK, this might not be an issue, in Poland however, where the lifespan of political parties has generally been much shorter, this created a set of data that was difficult to compare or draw any conclusions from.

Nevertheless, ultimately, what the survey made possible is a better contextualized analysis of the many intersections at play in my participants' lives and narratives, adding more texture to these and helping to define, and at times also to productively challenge the categories that my intersectionally informed analysis rests upon. Hence, in the process of data analysis and in the discussion that follows from this, I used the survey results in dialogue with the interview transcripts to gain a better understanding of the ways in which my participants are positioned but also position themselves in the social worlds they inhabit.

#### **4.4. Data management and the use of software**

In the time when most of the data we produce, collect and use is digitalized, data management and security have become of paramount importance for the research process alongside the more traditional concerns of handling physical documents. Consequently, all physical documents pertaining to this study (consent forms, filled out surveys, interview notes) are kept in a locked cabinet at a secure location. All physical documents except for the interview notes have been scanned. All electronic files are kept on password-protected computer to which only I have access. All electronic files are backed up for security purposes onto a password-protected external hard drive. No files have been stored, shared, or backed up online. All files have been handled and stored in compliance with both the UK and Polish data protection regulations.

Moreover, the online testimonies and the interviews transcripts were analyzed with the help of qualitative data analysis software NVivo. The

interviews transcripts were divided into three subgroups based on the ‘type’ of participant (past RT participant, LGBT activist, member of WiT) and uploaded into separate folders – in NVivo referred to as projects – created within the software and coded for themes and corresponding subthemes.<sup>75</sup> At times where the categories overlapped (i.e. a past participant of RT group who is also a member of WiT) the transcript was uploaded into only one project with priority given to the category that was smaller in numbers and coded accordingly. Figure 4.2 provides an example of a theme – in NVivo referred to as a ‘node’ – *Discrimination* with the relevant subthemes that were identified in the transcripts (*Everyday, Historical, In comparison to the rest of Europe, Legal, Of religious LGBT people, Violence*).

Name	Sources	Referen...	Created On	Created...	Modified On	Modified By
Discrimination	1	1	20 Jan 2016, 17:50	MM	21 Jan 2016, 17:34	MM
Everyday	2	9	22 Jan 2016, 13:40	MM	22 Jan 2016, 16:37	MM
Historical	3	3	20 Jan 2016, 18:00	MM	21 Jan 2016, 15:57	MM
In comparison to the rest of Europe	7	15	20 Jan 2016, 17:57	MM	22 Jan 2016, 16:41	MM
Legal	5	9	20 Jan 2016, 17:50	MM	22 Jan 2016, 16:36	MM
Of religious LGBT people	4	15	20 Jan 2016, 18:51	MM	22 Jan 2016, 16:47	MM
Violence	2	2	20 Jan 2016, 18:45	MM	22 Jan 2016, 13:43	MM
Gender	3	15	21 Jan 2016, 16:19	MM	22 Jan 2016, 13:47	MM
Geography	0	0	20 Jan 2016, 19:16	MM	20 Jan 2016, 19:17	MM

Figure 4.2: Example of a theme in NVivo

At this point it is important to note that even though the software provided a useful way for organizing data, I used it predominantly for the purpose of gaining an overview of the content and for making it readily available to efficiently search for words and phrases. The themes and subthemes were thus not designed to represent the content in any complete and categorical way – another person might have categorized and coded the same content differently – but rather they were put in place to create a visual map of certain ideas and issues that the interviewees talked about. Here again a resemblance to grounded theory can be noted, yet, the approach I take is not as rigid in terms of the types of codes as the two step process of initial followed by focused coding that grounded theory follows (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). The strategy I apply is instead inspired by thematic analysis, a method ‘for the subjective interpretation of the content data through the systematic classification process of coding and

<sup>75</sup> Transcripts from interviews that did not fit any of the categories (two in total) were analyzed without the use of software.

identifying themes or patterns' (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). Thematic analysis aims to classify qualitative data through a transparent, coherent and consistent coding strategy, yet in my experience, just as the stories participants tell to narrate their experiences, the data produced is often messy, inconsistent and at times ambiguous. Thus, whilst thematic analysis and using software to code the data is useful for discovering certain patterns, it can fail to capture inconsistencies and contradictions, simply because it is designed to look for regularities over omissions, absences and ambiguities. My approach has been to incorporate these into the analysis, where relevant, in an attempt to avoid the flattening out of the discursive landscape that emerged from my transcripts for the sake of artificial consistency and forced harmony. Consequently, I also try to incorporate what Celia Kitiznger refers to as "difficult" data' (2004, p. 121), or accounts that are problematic because they reinforce the inequitable power relations that my research hopes to address. Whenever possible, I describe these problematic moments and explicitly state my lack of agreement with them, and the rationale behind the same.

#### **4.5. Epistemological considerations, reflexivity and ethics**

Methodology is always problematic because no rule of method can ensure a direct connection between knowledge and reality (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002, p. 42).

Considering the sensitive nature of the topics this study is concerned with there were several ethical issues that needed to be addressed prior to the fieldwork. First of all, as this research includes interactions with human participants, it required an ethical review to ensure that criteria for adequate confidentiality, privacy and data protection have been met. Such review was conducted in line with the institutional guidelines of LSE. I have already discussed the steps taken to ensure that all participants have been given adequate information about the project, its scope and aims, and that the consent they have given was indeed informed. To reiterate, all information obtained during the course of this study has been made anonymous on the occasions when it was discussed, or used (i.e. in this thesis, conference papers).

It is important to note that the careful preparation of all the printed

materials, attention to feminist research methodology, as well as relevant methodology trainings – including *Gender, Knowledge and Research Practice*, *Research Ethics* and *In-Depth Interviewing* – undertaken prior to the fieldwork have proven to be highly useful and was explicitly recognized and appreciated by the study participants on several occasions. Indeed, during one interview, my participant, an LGBT activist asked to photocopy the *Information Sheet* and *Consent Form* I had given them and asked if they could use these to set an example of good practice. They spoke of the numerous instances when researchers would come, interview them and then leave without providing any such documents. Many participants and LGBT activists in particular were also very enthusiastic about the possibility of receiving a summary of the results, as again, the overall feeling was that researchers come, ask questions and leave, or as one participant put it ‘take without giving anything back’.

Nevertheless, at times, I could not escape the feeling that what I was ‘taking’ was somehow greater than what I can ever give back and also that the results of this study might not be what the people who contributed to its making might have hoped for. This is well captured with my exchange with Aleksander:

MM: So based on your experience it [RT] does not work?

Aleksander: Yes. Moreover... here again we have this church method... ‘Give testimonies!’ I would not want that. I would want – and that’s why I agreed to this interview – damn it! Go research it [RT]! Show in a form of a statistic, not one testimony, cause that drives me crazy... Somebody show me some statistics finally! Let the scientists in! Let’s open up, if you say it [RT] works, go ahead, let the scientists in. If you let the scientists in, I am certain and very confident about it [that it will be dismissed] and they are not, they close themselves off... and that’s why I think it’s necessary to study it scientifically...

MM: I hope you realize that my study is not quantitative, but it’s based on these kinds of interviews, so there probably won’t be any statistics.

Aleksander: Ah well, maybe one day there will be. Maybe one day it will all add up and there will be one (Aleksander, past RT participant, 2015).

Whilst the qualitative approach I took in this study allowed me to get a rich picture of individual stories of RT as a practice, going forward, ideally a combination of qualitative and quantitative strategies would be best suited to provide a precise mapping of the scale and scope of the practice in Poland today, which in turn could answer Aleksander’s call for large scale results.

Moreover, and as signaled in the above quote from Aleksander, part of my work before, during and after the interviews included managing my participants' expectations. This was further complicated by the institutional support of what is a world-renown university at which I have been doing my doctoral research. At times my interviewees were explicit that they expect high quality findings from someone representing LSE. The issue here is of course that what might be considered 'quality findings' by me might not necessarily collude with what my interviewees would classify as such. Also, there is a lot to be said about the kind of positivist logic behind such framing of science and research, and feminist scholars have long critiqued the notion of the neutrality of the scientific method (Alcoff & Potter, 2013; Harding, 1993; Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002).

However, most frequently, when recognized, the LSE label was viewed positively, in particular with interviewees who were academics themselves. Yet the institutional 'pressure' also worked in more surprising ways and at times to undermine my position as a researcher, as in the instance when I was told by the person previously involved in running of one of the RT groups that they thought my project was 'ideologically driven' and that they were 'surprised that such a serious institution [LSE]' accepted it. In that moment I felt obliged to defend my position and spent the last five minutes of the interview discussing whether knowledge can *ever* be objective and free of ideological influences. The whole exchange paired with a patronizing attitude that my participant adopted towards me – they took every opportunity to correct my Polish and pointed out a typo in the survey I asked them to fill out – and their habit of interrupting me constantly, left me unsettled, and angry, and I had to work really hard to stay 'professional'. Later on during my fieldwork I found myself having to ask this interviewee for assistance with getting in touch with another potential participant and they did help me, for which I am grateful. Still, this was arguably the most challenging of the interviews also because it was clear that the interviewee and I had very different sets of investments and views. This in turn made me aware of the ways in which interviewing people who are not 'like us' might be both very challenging but also formative and rewarding in ways that differ from the positive affect generated through our interactions with people with whom we have a lot in common.

Feminist scholarship has long argued that the positionality of the researcher is consequential in the process of knowledge production, dismissing the notions that knowledge can ever be fully objective and developing an alternative to the ‘god-trick’ of scientific rationality and the inadequate bias that these obscure (Harding, 1993; Haraway, 1988; Code 1993). This study is indebted to this tradition and it is this point I was arguing with my interviewee. I agree with Dorothy Smith (1990) that knowing is always relational. Thus, the need to disclose *who* knows is as urgent as the need for disclosing *what* is known about *whom*. Therefore, a level of reflexivity and self-reflexivity is required to account for this relationship of *knowing*. Consequently, the facts that I am a Polish-born female from working class background, in her mid thirties, living abroad for over a decade now, undertaking a PhD in gender studies at a British university, in a long term straight relationship, and an atheist need to be accounted for, as they all have influenced the way this study emerged, and developed. Yet their influence was also uneven and highly relational. In the example discussed above, the fact that I was a younger woman did matter, the power relation in that context was not in my favor, my authority was undermined, I was interrupted repeatedly and my entire project was put into question. On other occasions, it was wrongly assumed that I am an expert on issues ranging from LGBT organizing in the UK to the history of Church-state relations in Western Europe, or that I’m a practicing Catholic, or that I am from a privileged background. Whenever possible I did my best to correct such assumptions and answer any questions asked about my own life as honestly as possible. At times this would leave my participants disappointed (as in the case of my assumed expertise) or would make them more wary, or even defensive (when religious participants were faced with my declarations of atheism).

Furthermore, as Sandra Harding reminds us: ‘it is a delusion... to think that human thought could completely erase the fingerprints that reveal its production process (Harding, 1993, p. 57).’ Thus, all of the variables that contribute to the unique standpoint that I am writing from have had implications for my ability to gain access to information and informants, and establish a rapport, even if it was not always as evident as in the case of RT groups’ refusal to meet me. As there can be no mistake that I consider the very premise of RT unethical, oppressive and troubling and that my political commitment is to full

LGBTQ and gender equality, it was arguably ‘easier’ to interview LGBT activists, whose cause I support more fully, even if I also critique certain aspects of their work and politics in this study. Committed to the feminist method of strong objectivity, my project was premised on the idea that social science should be ‘integrated into democracy-advancing projects’ for reasons that are epistemological as much as they are political (Harding, 1993) (Harding, 1993, pp. 69, 71). I often found myself challenged by my interactions with members of WiT and in the face of WiT’s politics that I personally found too assimilationist and too accepting of the gender inequality within the Church at large. Yet, paradoxically, based on my Catholic upbringing, it was often their stories I could relate to more easily. Also, it was in my interactions with WiT members that my own acquired – through the experience of migration and resulting educational and economic advantage – privilege was most palpable. Such views and feelings are reflected in this study and thus, they must be accounted for through taking both the subject and the object of knowledge production into account.

Last, but certainly not least, reflexivity – even though an integral part of the project of feminist knowledge production – is in itself a marker of privilege. In the words of Bev Skeggs, ‘the ability to be reflexive via the experience of others is a privilege, a position of mobility and power, a mobilization of cultural resources’ (Skeggs, 2004; p. 129). Having conducted this study has made me acutely aware of such privilege but also of the responsibility that comes with it. As feminist methodologies imply that ‘researchers bear moral responsibility for their politics and practices’ (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002, p. 16) this project is a balancing act of my wish to give a voice to my participants, to not misrepresent them and still to say something meaningful about their politics in the context of the social worlds they are part of.

#### **4.5.1. Translation**

Language is used to create and re-create social worlds and identities and no one person is positioned neutrally in these processes (Temple, 2006; p. 3).

This study is bilingual, the language of the thesis is English, but all the interviews have been conducted in Polish and the texts and practices I examine are produced and happen in a different linguistic locality, Poland. I am a native

Polish speaker, but I received all of my academic training in English at universities in Ireland and the UK; the fieldwork was conducted in Poland, but I live and work in London (and Manchester), and I have not been living in Poland for the last sixteen years. Thus, one of the most obvious epistemological challenges of this study is translation. From having to think about my study in Polish and prepare the necessary documents for my fieldwork, through finding the right words to express myself to my interviewees, to struggling to find the right words when translating extracts of the interviews into English, translation has been an ever-present concern.

The issues around translation go beyond the translatability of words and meanings from one language to another, as important as these undeniably are. What is at stake in translation is also the power and politics of language and, relatedly, the ethical considerations of representing someone in a language they do not use/understand themselves. This concern was somehow mitigated by the fact that majority of my participants spoke English as a second language. Notably, only one of my participants reported not knowing any foreign languages and several reported knowing more than one. In fact, LGBT activists were prone to using English words and expressions when discussing their work, they were for instance notoriously pronouncing the LGBT acronym as one would in English, rather than in Polish, used English and Polish words to create new word compounds such as for example *'inicjatywy bottom-up'* when referring to bottom-up initiatives, or spoke of *'lobbying'* and places being *'LGBT-friendly'* using English words. This signals both the global reach and dominance of the English language, as well as certain linguistic gaps that exist in Polish whereby words are borrowed to describe *new* phenomena or new ways of thinking about these.

Nevertheless, the majority of the communication happened in Polish and if translation can be considered as 'travelling between languages' (Alvanoudi, 2009; p. 32), then the questions of power and representation that it raises are the inevitable baggage that one brings when embarking on and returning from such travels. In my case part of this 'baggage' consisted of over a decade spent abroad, with limited exposure to the Polish language in my everyday life and it felt particularly heavy at the very start of my fieldwork, when I often found myself forgetting Polish words, or clumsily translating English expressions into



Polish literally. This has proven particularly burdensome in the interview I described above as probably the most challenging one. It was one of the first ones that I conducted during my fieldwork and my initial nervousness, paired with rusty Polish made for a bad combination.

Finally, translation is a process of mediating meaning in which the positionality of the translator – including questions of gender, social class, sexuality, age, individual history, ethnicity, and many more – plays an important role, in constructing the worlds it aims to approximate through language (Temple, 2005). Temple urges researchers to actively and self-reflexively engage with translation and suggests that: ‘It is up to researchers to investigate the links and to persuade the reader of differences and similarities in meanings across languages’ (Temple, 2005, p. 12). ‘The perspectives of bilingual researchers’ and the way they utilize language should be included in such investigations (ibid.). Consequently, I chose to include some of the more troublesome words and expressions from my interviews in the footnotes and elaborate upon them, to account for my choices of translations. At times, I also provide an alternative meaning that the original word carries in the context.

#### **4.6. Concluding remarks**

In this chapter I provide an account of the research process and the methodological ‘how’ of this study. To conclude, I would like to emphasize some of the tensions that I discuss above and stress once again the way in which the actual doing of this study has been an iterative process of working through not only the relationship between empirical data and theory, but also through issues of power, positionality and responsibility to conduct research in an ethical but also politically conscious way. The level of theoretical flexibility that this study is a result of enabled it to develop in unexpected directions. This in turn opens up avenues for further research projects from this previously unexplored theoretical perspective that, if pursued, could change the way that politics of sexuality in Poland are written and thought about and, perhaps down the line also how they are done. Whilst I have emphasized the value of the qualitative approach I take in this project that allowed me to access individual stories of people directly affected by practice of RT or involved in the making

of the Polish LGBT movement, I am also acutely aware of its limitations and the need for future studies that would pursue a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Finally, the ethical considerations around representation and what follows potential misrepresentation of my participants as well as the individuals, and organizations that refused to take part in this study have guided me throughout this project. At the same time, and informed by feminist methodologies, I must conclude that not doing anything at all is not the more ethical option and I have tried to balance the risks and gains involved in working with human participants to my best abilities and knowledge.

## **Chapter 5. Polish LGBT Movement, Christian LGBT organizing, Gender and WiT's Godly Homonormativity**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This project has set out to investigate how grassroots politics of sexuality in contemporary, postsocialist Poland are shaped and circumscribed by processes of neoliberalization, and how differences of class, gender, and location position subjects differently within the landscape of the former. As many scholars have argued and as discussed in detail in Chapter 2, the effects of neoliberalization expand beyond matters of economy, affecting the way in which the social world is perceived and individual lives narrated; they also profoundly influence politics of sexuality. The results of this influence can be felt across a range of practices and sites – with commodification of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual) lives and identities being a prime example of the ways in which market and sexuality collude. Another, and not unrelated way in which politics of sexuality has been thought through in relation to neoliberalization is via the debates around homonormativity, understood as a set of norms that result in limited assimilation of gays and lesbians into mainstream middle-class culture, a process that reasserts rather than undermines the prevailing heteronorm. For many, and for Lisa Duggan (2003) in particular, homonormativity is *the* sexual politics of neoliberalism and what I aim to do in this chapter specifically is to discuss the extent to which the same can be said about the Polish case. Have processes of neoliberalization fostered homonormative politics and if so, what are the locally specific homonormative impulses and politics? Attention to locally specific expressions of homonormativity is important, insomuch as in order to be useful analytically homonormativity cannot be regarded as uniform or all encompassing. Thus, as Gavin Brown (2012) argues through Weiss (2011), researchers need to 'map the complex and often contradictory social dynamics that produce and are, in turn, reproduced *within particular sexual cultures, practices and desires*' (Weiss, 2011, p. 7 quoted in Brown, 2012; emphasis added).

As I demonstrate in Chapter 3, the temporal conditions in which the

Polish LGBT movement emerged and LGBT issues first came to the fore of public debate, link it intimately to the larger processes of neoliberalization that became the dominant political project after the fall of state socialism in 1989, as discussed in Chapter 1; a fact that has remained unexplored in the studies of the Polish LGBT movement thus far. At the same time, it has been argued extensively that the emergence of the Polish LGBT movement, also in the context of Poland's accession to the European Union (EU), has posed a direct challenge to the 'Polish-Catholic-Straight' construct, bringing to the fore questions around sexual citizenship and discrimination. Yet, and as I discuss in this chapter, attempts to redefine this construct in the context of ongoing discriminatory practices and attitudes of the Polish Roman-Catholic Church brought about a set of new exclusions, which – by defining LGBT subjectivities in opposition to religion – made subjectivities of LGBT Christians invisible. As discussed in the Chapter 3, the existing literature on LGBT discrimination in Poland, points to the Catholic Church as a major source of negative attitudes towards LGBT people. The participants of my study confirm this view, but rather than repeating this by now well-rehearsed argument, I begin my discussion by situating the experiences of Polish LGBT Christians, within the larger context of the Polish LGBT movement and by interrogating how the view of opposition between religion and the LGBT movement is troubled by *Wiara i Tęcza* (Faith and Rainbow, WiT) with its proposition of Polish-LGBT-Christian as a 'valid' subject position. I discuss the way in which WiT can be seen as a direct response to the status quo where the Polish LGBT movement is often positioned in an openly antagonistic relation to religion, in particular to Roman Catholicism; I examine how this is resisted both individually and collectively and how such resistance redraws the boundaries of what is possible both within the Polish LGBT movement and to an extent also within the Church. These discussions provide the locally specific mapping of a 'particular sexual culture' from which I examine WiT's brand of homonormative politics. Consequently, in the second part of the chapter I investigate the limits of emancipatory potential of WiT's project, in particular in relation to its inattention and silence on the issues of gender inequality within the Church and its normative politics, which produce a new set of ideas and ideals, which I term *godly homonormativity*. My conclusion is that WiT, despite being an important voice

for LGBT Christians in Poland, is generative of largely assimilationist ideas that consolidate homonormativity as arguably the dominant form of LGBT politics. As such it colludes with the neoliberal project that promotes a privileged form of gay life that attempts to replicate aspects of state- and in the case of WiT church-endorsed heterosexual primacy.

Finally, what is important to point out before I proceed with my analysis of WiT is that in the context of Poland, religion is often implicitly equated with Roman Catholicism, which is evident in some of the quotes used in this chapter. Indeed, the majority of the Christians interviewed for this study are Catholic, with only one participant, who self-identified as Protestant. Thus, unless otherwise stated 'Church' refers to the Roman Catholic Church in Poland. Nevertheless, I consider the validity of the phrase 'LGBT Christians in Poland' as a meaningful analytical category, not only to give voice to the minority religious identities that are often overlooked in Poland, but also to align with WiT's own emphasis on working together as Christians, above the denominational divides (which is evident in the group's publications as well as in the interviews with the group's members); WiT self-identifies as follows:

We are a group of Polish Christians LGBTQ... as well as their families and friends...  
Changing the perception within the Church we contribute to the increase of tolerance and subsequently to acceptance within society as a whole, and to the increase of level of mutual goodwill (Wiara i Tęcza, 2016).

## **5.2 Polish LGBT movement and the limits of inclusion**

### **5.2.1 The non-issue of religion?**

The overall picture that emerges from the literature on the Polish LGBT movement constructs it as secular, liberal and linked to religion only through opposition. This view is very frequently reiterated in interviews with LGBT activists – religion is constructed as of no interest to their work, provided that it does not result in discrimination outside of its own bounds, whilst the hierarchical Church is viewed almost exclusively as an adversary; a quote from Adrian, an LGBT activist illustrates this point well:

Adrian: We are very much detached from it [religion], our approach to religion remains indifferent as long as the religion... does not discriminate in non-religious life...

MM: And what about your relationship to the Church?

Adrian: There is hardly any, and if there is any official one then, well we are rather in opposition to each other (Adrian, LGBT activist, 2015).

The hierarchical church is positioned in an exclusively antagonistic relationship to the LGBT movement, even if religion more generally is dismissed as not directly relevant. At the same time, some LGBT activists view their particular LGBT organizations as religion-friendly, based for instance on the fact that they cooperate, or share spaces with WiT. This view is illustrated by Karolina's statement below:

Well, the relationship of our organization towards religion is probably the most positive from all the [LGBT] organizations, because from the beginning... we had the WiT group here (Karolina, LGBT activist, 2015).

However, such supposed openness in matters of religion of the organization Karolina is a member of – based on its accommodating attitude towards WiT – is constructed against a view that overall LGBT activists and generally LGBT people *are* in fact in opposition to religion, which additionally, in Karolina's narrative, becomes conflated with the Church:

So, I think there is much more openness here than in other organizations, because it's well-known that in Poland LGBT people are rather in conflict with the Church, it was even shown in some studies, that there are less religious people [amongst LGBT], rather they are negative towards the Church, *especially if they are activists...* (Karolina, LGBT activist, 2015; emphasis added).

Such framing of religion is instructive inasmuch that it constructs the Polish LGBT activism in an oppositional relationship to the Church and religion. At the same time and importantly, what is made invisible in the process are the subjectivities of these LGBT persons, and also LGBT activists, for whom religion, or being part of the Church might be significant. Moreover, and as signaled above, conflating religion with the Church obscures the difference that

exists between an individual believer and the institution.<sup>76</sup> Overall, the LGBT activists I interviewed for this study were prone to use the Catholic Church as a universal signifier for religion.<sup>77</sup> Arguably, such a totalizing view of the religious landscape is understandable, considering on one hand the statistical significance of the Roman Catholic denomination in Poland and on the other hand the hegemonic position of its institutions. At the same time, such unreflective equating of religion with the (institutional) Church is consequential for how religious people and in particular Catholics are perceived. This is illustrated in Karolina's response to the question whether the LGBT organization she is an activist for is open to people who are religious: 'If they were to display<sup>78</sup> their religiosity, they would probably have to do it within WiT, but in general yes, in particular to *other* [non Catholic] religions [laughs]' (Interview with Karolina, LGBT activist, 2015; emphasis in original). What is signaled in this statement is not only that making one's religion visible is not a practice that would be met with approval within the space of the LGBT organization in question – again, moderated by the fact that religious expression is supposedly accommodated within the bounds of WiT – but also that followers of *other religions* might be more welcome than Catholics;<sup>79</sup> this is despite the explicit commitment to openness and non-discrimination that all of the Polish LGBT organizations declare. This kind of politics becomes grounds for exclusions, as well as potentially forcing religious LGBT activists to conceal their religion. A point demonstrated by the following answer from Kinga:

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<sup>76</sup> When asked specifically about their organization's attitude towards the Catholic Church Martyna, who is both an LGBT activist and a member of WiT, states that their organization:

does not have any relationship with the church in general, it is so to say completely outside - atheistic, well 'atheistic', nondenominational, it does not engage with this subject at all (Martyna, LGBT activist and member of WiT, 2015).

Thus, here we can see that the conflating happens also the other way, i.e., the Church comes to stand in for religion and the atheistic character of the organization is emphasized.

<sup>77</sup> With an exception of a Katowice based LGBT activist who when asked about the relationship between the organization and the church spoke of their cooperation with a Lutheran Church-affiliated organization that works with HIV-positive people locally (Przemek; LGBT activist, 2015).

<sup>78</sup> The exact word used here is 'uzewnętrzniać', which literally translated means 'to externalize'

<sup>79</sup> It is of course questionable how the declared openness to 'other' religions would work out in the context of the growing Islamophobia that ensued in relation to the refugee crisis.

MM: Are there no religious people in your organization?

Kinga: Hmmm, I know that there are [pauses]. But we realized that... when someone made a joke and somebody else said that they do not want to hear it and it was kind of a shock, because it turns out that at our [organization] it is unseemly, it is unseemly to be religious (Kinga, LGBT activist, 2015).

Kinga's observation above points to the ways in which the space of the LGBT organization she is a member of is *assumed* to be secular and someone's negative reaction to a joke about religion thus comes as a shock. Asked explicitly if the existing LGBT organizations in Poland (besides WiT) in any way address the interests of religious LGBT persons, another LGBT activist's response points to how such exclusion of religion from the space of LGBT organizing is reflected in their work:

I think that in theory yes, however, I am under the impression that it does not resonate too strongly... that in theory nobody is to be discriminated because of their religiosity, but... I have not come across any campaigns organized by LGBT organizations that would be in any specific way addressed to a religious person. Rather it is a topic [that is left] untouched, rather what resonates more often is a critique of the politics of the Catholic Church, opposition towards statements from various church hierarchs... or persons' who represent the Church in some way (Darek, LGBT activist, 2016).

Darek's response highlights the *in principle* commitment that most LGBT organizations have to non-discrimination, whilst at the same time pointing out the reality – the lack of actual initiatives that would address the needs of religious LGBT persons. Once again, the point is made that for LGBT organizations religion becomes a subject viewed predominantly through an adversarial relationship to the Church. This is of importance, for it brings to the fore questions around the limits of inclusivity, which are tested by Catholicism with its conservative, hierarchical aspects as represented by the institution of the Church.

Finally, at times the issue of religion is dismissed as entirely irrelevant to people's work as LGBT activists as indicated in Sylwia's response below:

MM: Are there any openly religious people working in your organization?

Sylwia: Well, I don't have this kind of details, whether they are openly religious. I think that it doesn't matter at all, in this kind of contact, in activism, for me it does not connect at all with whether someone is in this kind of organization, but is religious, for me this [long pause]



MM: It does not matter?

Sylwia: It does not matter. Yes. What a person believes in, or what they like to wear, or whatever, or whom they love, these are completely different things (Sylwia, an LGBT activist, 2015).

However, I would argue that there is a certain level of tension between the irrelevance of religiosity of their members to LGBT organizations' operations as declared by Sylwia and other LGBT activists and the way in which religious institutions continue to oppose the very work, and at times existence of these organizations. Positioning religion as irrelevant appears also to be somehow peculiar, if we consider that the Polish context is anything but free from its influence. What the quote from Sylwia points to is that religion is not discussed in the realm of the organization she volunteers with, because it does not matter, however, one could question whether the opposite might in fact be equally if not more valid. Finally, regardless the explanation behind it, what Sylwia's account signals, is similarly to the point made by Kinga above, is that religiosity is not an aspect of LGBT activists' lives that is shared in the spaces of LGBT organizing. In effect, these spaces are perceived as exclusively secular. Yet, LGBT Christians interviewed for this study actively contest such positioning of religion as a 'non-issue' whilst also questioning the exclusionary politics that it engenders, and it is their particular understanding and experiences that I examine next.

The LGBT Christians, all members of WiT, interviewed for this study present quite a different view of the LGBT movement in Poland than their 'secular' counterparts. To begin with, they are highly critical of the unreflective lack of the distinction between the hierarchical Church and its followers that some representatives of the LGBT movement in Poland demonstrate. In the words of Sebastian, member of WiT:

[T]he attitudes towards the Catholic Church are very negative in this gay milieu, which is understandable, cause the Church causes terrible harm... but at the same time it is untrue, cause *you cannot put an equality sign between the hierarchical church and an average, ordinary Catholic, 20 years old, who is not at all culpable, who lives in a small town, in a village, somewhere in Lasy Janowskie.*<sup>80</sup>

And later:

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<sup>80</sup> Lasy Janowskie is a heavily forested region located in south-eastern Poland.

We know perfectly well and first hand how cruel the Church can be - *I am thinking about the institutional, hierarchical church here* - cruel towards its own believers. On the other hand they forget [LGBT activists], that if a Catholic comes, that usually this poor guy, or a girl is a victim and not any bishop, who roars from the pulpit. So based on this we are at best overlooked. Predominantly, we are not noticed (Sebastian; member of WiT, 2015; emphasis added).

Additional quote from Sebastian illustrates yet another important point, namely, that given the Polish context, it is likely that there are gays, and arguably also LBT people, to whom religion and in particular Catholicism might be a meaningful point of reference:

[T]he general demographic facts, when I say that the majority of gays in Poland are at least christened and raised in Catholic culture, and thus, it's a fact. Not that they must go to church every Sunday, but it's a fact that they were raised in this culture and it might be something important to them, and here this is being absolutely rejected. A real gay is not Christian, a real gay can be a Buddhist, but he cannot be a Catholic, right? (Sebastian; member of WiT, 2015)

Sebastian also calls out the double standard that positions some religions as more 'compatible' with being gay in Poland as well as pointing out a supposed contradiction of Christian LGBT subjectivity. The complex nature of the intersection of sexuality and religion, both on an individual and political level was a common theme for all WiT members. The following discussion in the focus group interview with six members of WiT, further exemplifies the political aspect of it:

Kasia: Previously it was definitely like that, that the LGBTQ milieu in Poland was quite excluding of persons, who wanted to combine their sexuality with [belonging to] the Church, that in general religious persons were excluded.

Justyna: I think it is still like this.

Kasia: It can be.

Justyna: I can even confirm with an episode from the last [equality] march, when we were unrolling such a big *Wiara i Tęcza* banner and we wanted to ask people who were marching there, to carry it and some of them when they saw that it was Christians, then [they said] no.

Monika: They run away. From the banner. Even if that was only to unroll the banner, not to walk with it during the whole march...Because I think that we have been very, very deeply hurt by the Church... And now when I sit with gays and lesbians I can hear a lot of jokes about Catholics, about believers, about vergers,<sup>81</sup> about priests... *You are either one or the other*. Also when Justyna said the thing about the teams [that heterosexual people who support the LGBT equality cause

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<sup>81</sup> Verger is a person, usually a layperson, who assists in the ordering of religious services.

are treated as if they were sabotaging their team], it made me think of that, that we are on that team a bit [with the Church], a bit as if we would pass them the ball (Focus group interview with Monika, Justyna, Kasia, Mariusz, Ewelina and Filip, members of WiT, 2015; emphasis added).

Importantly, neither Sebastian nor Monika questions the fact that the Church as an institution is a source of injuries for LGBT people; rather, they resist the view in which every religious LGBT person becomes perceived and is treated as an accomplice in these injuries, passing the metaphorical ball, instead of changing teams, to take Monika's metaphor a step further. Consequently, even though some LGBT activists treat religion within their organizations as a non-issue, the narratives of LGBT Christians' experiences of LGBT organizations often stress feelings of marginalization and a sense of a particular double exclusion, as exemplified in Sebastian's words below:

There are plenty of people, who think that we have no right, Tomasz Terlikowski<sup>82</sup> thinks, that I have no right to be Catholic... many atheists think that I also have no right to be Catholic, I am [supposed to be] either a faggot or a Catholic, there is no both... *It is a paradox, Mr. Tomasz Terlikowski says that I am not a real Catholic, cause I am a faggot, and these ones [LGBT activists] say that I am not a real faggot, cause I am a Catholic. We say we are a minority within a minority. That's how we are being treated* (Sebastian, member of WiT, 2015).

Once again a sense of contradiction is expressed, in the zero sum game that makes it 'impossible' to be a 'Catholic faggot'. The sense of 'impossibility', or the least of mistakenness, a false consciousness of such subject position is enhanced by the view of religious LGBT people as victims, unaware of what is right for them:

In several issues of *Replika*...<sup>83</sup> there were texts about WiT, more or less, and [...] there was a text by [name of a WiT member], an interview with him, and later on *Replika's* profile [on Facebook]... it was announced that such a text will be published and then the comments, a tremendous amount of anti-Christian hate, anti, saying: they are still in the Church, they must be suffering from Stockholm syndrome, for sure, why don't you sign out, join another church...right? (Sebastian, member of WiT, 2015).

Following this logic, decisions to remain in the Church is perceived as an expression of inability to break loose from the oppressive shackles of religion

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<sup>82</sup> A Catholic journalist previously editor in chief of *Fronda.PL* – identified as one of the most LGBT-unfriendly news outlets in Poland today.

<sup>83</sup> A Polish LGBT magazine that comes out on a bimonthly basis.

grounded in a failure to comprehend that one is indeed being oppressed while the false consciousness makes one complicit in her/his own subjugation. This condescending view undermines not only the ability of LGBT Christians to decide what is best for them, but is also in total disregard for what is best for them *as LGBT Christians*.

Additionally, LGBT Christians challenge the positioning of religion as a non-issue as they point to a particular dissonance that in their view exists between the LGBT movement and Polish social reality, whereby Christianity is rejected too hastily and uncompromisingly, again, regardless of its social and cultural relevance. When asked about the relationship to the Church, Michał, a WiT member responded:

Inevitably, from the start this dialogue was in place, we consider it to be very important, *because of sociological circumstances, that the majority of Poles, also LGBT persons are Catholic* (Michał; member of WiT, 2015; emphasis added).<sup>84</sup>

Consequently, when faced with the question of whether they felt that the existing LGBT organizations represented their interests members of WiT interviewed for this study were more likely than not to offer a negative answer, or an answer that would signal some level of conflict, as in Adam's response below to the question whether he feels represented by the existing LGBT organizations:

By some yes, and by some not, and by some in certain aspects, but not in others. I am not, I don't feel represented when they talk about, when they talk about, when they too aggressively talk about, propose anti-religious postulates, the liberatory ones... I simply don't have these kinds of views (Adam, member of WiT, 2015).

Similarly, when asked to elaborate on whose interests do the Polish LGBT organizations represent Marcin states:

Marcin: I don't know, but in any case not mine, cause generally when I say that I am a religious person, to them I am an evil person, because I am a religious person, so I do not fit their beauty canon [laughs].

MM: And what is their beauty cannon?

Marcin: Of course, a non-believer and generally kind of a militant gay (Marcin, member of WiT, 2015).

Here, again, a politics of exclusion is signaled that discredits religious LGBT subjectivities placing them outside of the accepted standard and effectively also outside of the scope of groups whose interests would be representable for mainstream LGBT organizations. Interestingly, some participants felt that the existing LGBT organizations did in fact represent the interests of *all* LGBT people, provided that the latter identified with the acronym, an act considered by Robert to signal a certain level of self-acceptance:

I would start from the vocabulary... Dr Jurek Krzyszczyński, who is an expert in terminology and teaches English philology at UJ [Jagiellonian University], he is a perennial activist for LGBT emancipation, he says that L, so lesbian, G – gay, B – bisexual, T – transgender, people who define themselves in this way, these are the people who in some way already accept themselves, so I think, that these organizations represent the interests of LGBT people more less. But certainly they do not represent a number of homosexual persons, or transgender ones, who do not call themselves like that, or who call themselves the way the Church would have it 'I am a person with homosexual tendencies, unwanted ones' (Robert, member of WiT, 2015).

I will return to the question of vocabulary and its importance in Chapter 6, in relation to how similar distinctions are made and embodied by past participants of reparative therapy.

Nevertheless, what is of importance here is that in the context of the pervasive sense of marginalization and exclusion that LGBT Christians in Poland experience, the emergence of WiT could be seen as contributing to a slow shift of the boundaries of what becomes possible within the Polish LGBT movement, even if the shift is said to be met with initial suspicion. This is illustrated well by Martyna's statement:

[F]rom my experience... in WiT... it is like this, that in the beginning they [LGBT organizations] were a bit skeptical towards us, in the way that 'jeez, a believer, god, what is it?' - you know, kind of like a mole, a fifth column of Christianity, you know, it will get in here, into [name of organization]... and it will simply blow it up from within. But slowly, slowly, with time they simply got to know us, so that in a way it's not a problem, they know who we are, they trust us, right? (Martyna; member of WiT, 2015).

What the quote above illustrates is that since its establishment in 2010 WiT has managed to carve out and claim a space for itself within the landscape of the Polish LGBT movement; even if the tensions that the intersection of religion

and LGBT sexualities mobilize remain high, as demonstrated above. The work that LGBT Christians do in WiT is of importance to the understanding of bottom up sexual politics, as it is actively pushing the boundaries of what it means to be an LGBT person in Poland today. Additionally, in relation to the Church, WiT's work is important on two levels. Firstly, it provides an insider's view of the situation of LGBT people in the Church (understood here as the religious community) that in turn functions as a platform from which the discriminatory practices of the Church (as an institution) are scrutinized, challenged and to an extent also counteracted. I explore these issues in more detail below.

### **5.2.2 Altering (Some) Blueprints**

Generally, as I said, I have been connected to the Church and for me being in the Church that, that was something very important, it was also my identity, personality, generally through the lens of Christianity, etc., and then suddenly the church rejected me [because I am gay], right? And actually WiT, with this kind of accomplishment, of connecting this, these two worlds, and it was what I was looking for a long time, this kind of connecting of this homosexual personality with Christianity (Marcin, member of WiT, 2015).

WiT's goals outlined in the introduction are a mixture of support group and activist aspirations and my interviews with WiT members across the country echo this. What is worth highlighting in regards to the group's aims is the social support aspect; not only does WiT aim to fill the gap that undoubtedly exists in terms of distribution of LGBT organizations across the country – in fact in three out of ten locations in which WiT operates there is no other active LGBT organization – they also offer assistance in accessing their groups. In effect, WiT is the only LGBT group in Poland that makes a conscious effort to be accessible, regardless of location, addressing the issue of metrocentricism of LGBT organizing in Poland, to which I return in Chapter 7. Similarly, in what can be described as redistributive spirit, the group offers financial support for people who cannot afford to attend its yearly retreat (Michał, member of WiT, 2015). Nevertheless, providing a space in which religious people can come to terms with their LGBT sexualities and to support them through this process constitute some of the most central aspects of WiT's work; the positive impact

this has on the people who come to WiT is summarized well by Martyna:

The process of accepting one's [sexual] orientation happens really fast in a group, if a person is alone, well then this process takes longer, it is worse, qualitatively worse, that support is not there. There are a lot of dilemmas, problems, more, you know, 'am I doing the right thing' or of the 'I sin/I don't sin' kind... And when it comes to these people, for me it is obvious that this is a support group, and *that's what WiT is for, right?* (Martyna, member of WiT, 2015; emphasis added).

The demand for the support WiT offers varies, thus for example a WiT member in Gdańsk reported times when the group had no regular meetings as there was not enough interest (Ola, member of WiT, 2015);<sup>85</sup> yet, the demand is noticeably higher in places where no other LGBT organizations operate, where WiT also fills in an existing gap as a meeting place for LGBT people, regardless of whether they are religious or not; this is illustrated well by a quote from Adam:

So, one could say that we are the only organization that exists [here]... And also what comes out of it is that guys come [and say] 'I am not religious, but I am looking for something, can I join you?' and it is an open group, so why not? Simply, there are no [other] places to meet (Adam, member of WiT, 2015).

Another quote from Sebastian, a member of WiT in another city where no other LGBT organization operates, highlights the high demand further:

The problem is rather that we have less people willing to work for others and we have more people who need help, bruised by life, people who need someone to talk to, someone to listen, or simply to be together with, than those, who could get engaged, and [we have] even less people who are out, I am not out (Sebastian, member of WiT, 2015).

The locational aspect is of importance and I return to it in greater detail in Chapter 7. What is relevant to note here is that WiT's very emergence was a response to a need for an organization that would represent the interests of a potentially large group of people, who did not feel represented by the, at times, explicitly anti-religion LGBT movement. Today WiT is arguably the biggest LGBT organization in Poland – also in terms of membership – and it is also the only one with a nation-wide presence, with ten local groups in operation at the time of writing.

Moreover, as well as being a support group for people who struggle with

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<sup>85</sup> At the time of the interview there were plans to restart the meetings.

reconciling their sexuality with religion, WiT also works to influence the way the Church treats LGBT people and some WiT members consider this pursuit to be a natural consequence of their religiosity, as expressed by Robert:

I will put it like this... that for me it is natural that I want to change the Church, because I feel that I am a religious person, my, my faith in Jesus is sort of the most important thing here, and the whole frame of that what the Church is, is a secondary matter, but at the same time a very important one, because that's where people suffer injuries (Robert, member of WiT, 2015)

Hence, arguably, WiT is the only LGBT group in Poland today that engages in direct lobbying activities with the Church hierarchs, as evidenced by another quote from Robert:

[I]n January this year we, as representatives of our group [WiT] had a meeting with bishop Grzegorz Ryś, who listened to us and said that in fact it is good that we exist, and that these kind of things have to be done patiently, bottom-up, and that it is a long process (Robert, member of WiT, 2015).

Robert's account above suggests that WiT's efforts are met with a surprisingly high level of understanding and good will. However, other WiT participants stressed the lack of actual results, as summarized by Michał:

Michał: We are also trying to keep a dialog with bishops, until now... we have had conversations with five bishops, but it is here that the resistance is the greatest, there is very big resistance, very, actually, this far nothing has come out of these conversations...

MM: And what are these conversations about?

Michał: Primarily, the point of departure for these conversations was the survey we conducted on the situation of LGBT persons, religious LGBT persons in the Polish Church, and it is always an excuse to tell about ourselves, and most of all to present our most important postulates, [thinks for a while], rather to say that we exist, if I could correct what I just said, rather to say that we exist than present any postulates, still (Michał, member of WiT, 2015).

Martyna expressed similar sense of ineffectiveness:

Recently the guys came up with this idea that they will go to the bishops and tell them about WiT and LGBTQ persons in the Church... As far as I know they have been going... the feedback is such that 'oh, we did not know, we will see, we will let you know, right, we will listen', they did listen, politely, nice and sympathetic, but nothing comes out of it, right? Cause what is supposed to come out of it...? We will see, maybe in that vein that a little by little does the trick, but I don't know, I don't know, I don't know, I don't know (Martyna, member of WiT, 2015).<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Martyna uses the Polish idiom *kropla drąży skalę*, which translates as 'constant dropping wears away a stone'.



Thus, the overall view was that there was very little hope for any immediate advances and the interest shown by the bishops was of no consequence for the status quo. Still, the value of WiT's critical voice cannot be underestimated, even if its members feel like no one is really willing, or ready to hear it.

At the same time, rather than treating the Church as the hierarchical institution that excludes them, some members of WiT stress the value of the Church understood as a community of believers, in which LGBT Christians have a right to claim space:

I am convinced that we all are the Church, christened, confirmed, simply the Church, unless someone gets out of it, because it does not suit them... However, if they stay, so in a way *they are this Church*, and they have the right to be in it, and they have the right to participate and to say something, *so for me the value of WiT is also in this that it is a place where, well, where everyone can say that we also are the Church, right?* (Martyna, member of WiT, 2015; emphasis added).

Such framing of what the Church is – a community of believers – is soundly grounded in Catholic theology, even if it could also be seen as reactive to the marginalization that Polish LGBT Christians face in the institutional Church. Yet, understanding the Church in this way enables members of WiT to reimagine what it means to be an LGBT subject within the Church, and by extension also what it means to be the Church.

Moreover, the majority of local WiT groups have at least one 'LGBT-friendly' priest; on a practical level it makes it possible for groups' members to partake in religious rituals such as mass, confession, or holy communion, which in Catholicism are seen as essential aspects of one's faith. It is however *through* the work of WiT that they can do so. On a psychological level it offers support and comfort to Catholic LGBT persons, as expressed by Ola:

[W]e don't really have relations with the Church, apart from some few very dear priests, whom we have, whom we adore and protect, like one of the priests here, who conducts also masses for us, in a sense that we know that he won't exclude us, that he won't say anything unpleasant about us and all homosexual people here know that this church... is a church<sup>87</sup> that is gentle towards LGBT persons (Ola, member of WiT, 2015).

Thus, by establishing relations with individual priests, or monasteries, WiT

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<sup>87</sup> Understood here as a physical space/building.

undermines the monolithic vision of the Church as always only excluding of LGBT people enabling for a more nuanced view of how individual clergymen approach the issue of LGBT inclusion. WiT's experiences evidence that there are people in the institutional Church that display more accepting attitudes towards LGBT people and are potentially more open to change. Even if their involvement occurs only at an unofficial level, often in fear of being found-out by their superiors, over time such bottom-up initiatives and the alliances that they build might bring about a much-needed change. Outside of the Church and support group work, WiT also engages in educational activities organizing talks, meetings, workshops (for instance for school teachers) and lectures that aim to highlight the problem of homophobia, or to discuss the situation of LGBT people in the Church (Adam, member of WiT, 2015; Emilia, member of WiT, 2015).<sup>88</sup>

Finally, WiT's flexible structure and informal character enable it to encompass a range of views that arguably might not be as easily contained within a more structured organization. WiT, as it functions today, encompasses an array of political views that range from socially liberal to conservative. The tension this generates become visible when strategies for the future are discussed, as there are opposing views on whether WiT should become a formal organization, or whether it should continue in its current form. Likewise, there are varying opinions on LGBT organizing more generally, thus, for instance, some WiT members were highly critical of the equality parades and the enhanced visibility they generated. The view was often that the marches give the 'wrong idea' of what it means to be an LGBT person, and that they have the opposite effect, as expressed by Sebastian: 'I don't go to the parades, not only because I am not out, but also because I think that they harm the cause' (Sebastian, member of WiT, 2015). Whereas others had very positive views and experiences related to marches, as Marcin who describes participating in the Warsaw march: 'I was hugely impressed – indeed Warsaw was blocked and that was so cool. I felt there like a union member. Great thing! I recommend it, really!' (Marcin, member of WiT, 2015). I will return to this point later on in

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<sup>88</sup> One of the more interesting initiatives, which WiT members were undertaking at the time of this study was to organize workshops about homophobia for religious instruction teachers (Emilia, member of WiT, 2015).

this chapter, as the disagreement around the parades is a reoccurring motif that again signals certain level of tension within the group, but also within the larger LGBT community in Poland.

What I focused on this far is the ways in which WiT is a) a response to certain set of exclusions within the Polish LGBT movement and b) how WiT poses a challenge to both the secular character of the movement and the assumption that makes a religious LGBT subject position impossible c) the work that WiT engages in. What I discuss next is the politics of the group in relation to gender issues, in particular to gender inequality within the church and its investment into the narrative of ‘normality’.

### **5.3 Gender issues and the godly homonormativity of WiT**

#### **5.3.1 Better off as women?**

For this study I interviewed 15 members of WiT: 7 women and 8 men including one trans man, and it could be said that there is a good gender balance within the group, as expressed by Sebastian:

[I]t is more-less equal, half girls, half guys, right, among these girl and guys there are also trans people, cause they are also girls and guys and when it comes to them it is similar to the society at large, so there is very few of them, but we are happy that they are amongst us. We really care that it is both girls and guys, and also these, and these there are really very few, but there are also people who are gender-fluid, or who place themselves outside of the binary gender division (Sebastian, member of WiT, 2015).

The gender issue in WiT is thus subtler than the matter of unequal representation; rather it pertains to certain views and attitudes that members of WiT hold. One such a view is of how gays and lesbians are perceived differently within the society, another one pertains to the issues of gender equality within the Church as a whole, and the lack of interests that WiT as a group in general has in challenging these. Firstly, in the rare instances when gendered experiences of gays and lesbians in general – so not within the Church – were discussed, they were usually narrated as advantageous to women, as in the below exchange from focus group interview:

Monika: I think that we have it easier as women.

Kasia: Very much so!

...

Monika: If someone gets beaten up, it's generally a male couple.

...

Justyna: It's because heterosexual men see lesbians as porn movie characters, but gays they see in a completely negative light (Focus group interview with Monika, Justyna, Kasia, Mariusz, Ewelina and Filip, members of WiT, 2015).

The fact that lesbians experience less direct violence is presented as proof that they 'have it easier' while the sexism that positions lesbians at a centre of male sexual fantasy passes unchallenged. Secondly, only two participants, both women, brought up the matter of gender inequality within the Church, whereby Ola merely touched upon the issue, whilst Martyna has developed what could be called a Christian-lesbian-feminist critique of the Church. Consequently, one of the issues brought up was the view that the Church is more oppressive of male homosexuality than that of female one because of the unequal position of the genders within the Church, as indicated by Ola:

This [Roman Catholic] Church is more oppressive for these [homosexual] men [...] Maybe it is because, maybe it's a matter of the Church itself, that a man means more in the Church than a woman, somehow the woman is the bottom of the Church, an insignificant bottom, so, even when I get text messages that say, that I will burn in hell, that point out that men who have sexual relations with men will not be saved, I just reply, 'but I am not a man', right? So in a way it is less oppressive for us (Ola, member of WiT, 2015).

In the quote above the subordinate status of women in the Church is viewed almost as an advantage, a circumstance that makes it easier to come to terms with one's sexuality as a lesbian in a 'since you don't matter anyway' kind of way.<sup>89</sup> The inequality is acknowledged and quite movingly so – with women referred to as the 'insignificant bottom' of the Church – but it is then left unchallenged. In the interview with Martyna, the difficulty that can potentially arise for men giving up their privileged position in the Church is addressed; she states:

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<sup>89</sup> The issue of the difference in gays' and lesbians' experience within the church was not something that many participants addressed or acknowledged.

Because of their [sexual] orientation, it is hard actually, cause I can imagine that they must have it difficult in this situation where on one hand as men they are fully allowed [into the Church hierarchy] and all of the sudden it transpires that their masculinity collides with their sexual orientation and they have to choose (Martyna, member of WiT, 2015).

At the same time, Martyna is much more outspoken about the injustice of what is in effect a gendered privilege:

In a way they [men] can always lie and they will always be allowed to enter, however us, women, we don't have that option... We can enter as 'handmaids of the Lord', so as nuns, yuck, yuck [with disgust], spit it out, right? Simply unacceptable at some point really (Martyna, member of WiT, 2015).

Moreover, Martyna sees the matter of working towards greater gender equality within Catholicism as a way of destabilizing the patriarchal structures of the Church whilst at the same time signaling the limits of WiT's emancipatory potential as a single-issue group:

[I]n a way for me there is something wrong here, that we [as WiT]... focus only on the question of sexual orientation. In my opinion it is like this, that the question of women is missing [in WiT's work], cause here I can see something of a picklock, that could get in [...] And in a way that is how I see my role [to highlight the issue of gender inequality] (Martyna, member of WiT, 2015).

At the same time, Martyna is aware that her simultaneous commitment to the Church and the emancipatory, even radical ideas is full of contradictions, pointing to the complexity of her intersectional positionality:

You know, in a way that is my role... [I]t shows a certain problem, where I have one foot in feminism, in the radical, rebellious kind, and on the other side I am in WiT, because religiosity and faith are important to me, right? And it is a kind of a split (Martyna, member of WiT, 2015).<sup>90</sup>

Nevertheless, Martyna's narrative provides valuable insights into the politics of WiT and in a way also exposes it as a culturally and politically conservative project. This comes to the fore when she discusses the sense of isolation she and her partner experience in their feminist struggle within WiT:

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<sup>90</sup> Martyna uses the Polish word *roz krok*, which refers position when one has one's legs very wide apart.

Well, but you know, the problem lies also within the women. Girls... women, who are religious as a rule have - and this is very similar to the guys, to the gays, cause they are also religious, they are traditionally religious, traditionally conservatively, they take it all as it is, right? Without any deeper reflection about it... that for them it is not a problem for example the question of female priesthood, it is not at all a problem for them... in a way they don't understand this, they also do not support [us], in general we get no support (Martyyna, member of WiT, 2015).

Ignoring the highly inequitable and sexist power relationship within the Church whilst seeking acceptance for LGBT people within it points to one of the limits of WiT's emancipatory potential. Thus, it could be argued that WiT's project is largely an assimilationist one, in particular when it comes to its gender politics and women's subordinate position within the Church. The results of WiT on the Polish politics of sexuality are thus contradictory; on the one hand it pushes the limits of what it means to be LGBT in Poland, redrawing the scope of interests that are representable and making space for religious LGBT subjectivities in a movement that frequently invisibilises and marginalizes them. On the other hand WiT is very much a single-issue project, aiming to end sexual orientation based discrimination within the Church. In the remaining part of this chapter I argue that this, combined with strong emphasis on long-term monogamous relationships, is generative of a new set of homonormative ideas.

### **5.3. 2. Homonormativity and WiT's godly homonormativity**

My interviews with Polish LGBT activists suggest that a specific set of homonormative ideals and practices might in fact be prevalent in Poland, in particular in the context of big urban centres where economically privileged LGBT people can live relatively freely – and 'relatively' is of importance here, considering the lack of legal equality and high levels of homo-, bi- and transphobia. This idea is summarized well by Darek:

I am under the impression that there is a lot of people... LGBT persons, who... do not live in hiding... *they go to parties in many places within the industry, to clubs, they have partners...* Somehow they do not see any barriers in this kind of lifestyle, they don't particularly need additional rights that would guarantee civil partnerships, or same-sex marriage... or lack of discrimination in the workplace. At work they are not out... and for them LGBT organizations that come out on the streets and speak in media... well, maybe it didn't cross their mind that this is necessary, because on a daily basis they are not met with any difficulties, but

hiding their orientation at work they... don't have the possibility to be met with negative reaction from people (Darek, LGBT activist, 2016; emphases added).

In the quote above Darek describes LGBT people as focused on consumption and the domestic sphere – the space where they can be open about their sexual orientation and a one, which according to Darek, they often keep separate from their professional lives. This description resonates closely with Lisa Duggan's work on homonormativity and her theorization of homonormativity characterized by 'a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption' (Duggan, 2003, p. 179). However, in the context of Poland it also has another dimension, inasmuch that it is compatible with certain mechanisms that developed under state socialism, where under the oppressive regime the private sphere was very heavily invested with ideas of authenticity of expression, as opposed to the public sphere, where a level of inauthenticity was required (on the special role of the private sphere under state socialism see for example Fuszara, 2010). Kinga, an LGBT activist from Warsaw had similar insights when she mapped out a framework in which partial freedom, is mistaken for full emancipation and in effect the scope for resistance becomes limited and discrimination denied:

[I]n Warsaw I am thinking of people, who enter the world of fashion, the world of media, world, that is accepting towards homosexual people, but on a very superficial level, *as if the emancipation already happened*, that you just jump into being gay or lesbian... But from the level of knowledge about the LGBT movement, or self-acceptance, or even I would venture into saying that at home nobody might know that they are gay or lesbian. But they are privileged enough that it would be unseemly if they complained about their situation; but they won't go to the parade, not to be seen, and [they think] that activism is for people who are bored, screamers... [as in:] 'what are you on about? There is no discrimination', but when discrimination happens at work they won't react, they will bite their tongues and not say anything (Kinga, LGBT activist, 2015).

Kinga views the complacency that she describes and the unwillingness of LGBT people to get involved in activism as real threats to the future of the LGBT movement at large. For her the tendency to take for granted the little gains that have been achieved – rather than perceiving them as a result of a struggle – is a way of undermining the emancipatory project. Similar points were made by Patrycja, another LGBT activist, who also compares such state of affairs to that of post-feminism:

Very often my gay, lesbian and trans friends... say 'yeah, yeah, the change will come', that 'it is happening one way or another, the change is inevitable'... that 'I get it, you are organizing yourself this march, cool, but you know, no [we won't come], cause we are going on a weekend break', or something. And I am under the impression that this is a problem... that it is a threat, because gays and lesbians somewhere out there choose their safe space [over activism] on this basis, like the feminist movement worked for women, [for] equal rights, and now women say 'no, no, no, I'm not a feminist', right? (Patrycja, LGBT activist, 2015).

Kinga and Patrycja's statements above represent a trend that was reflected in other LGBT activists' accounts and there are couple of important points to be made in relation to them. Firstly, my interviews with Polish LGBT activists signal that certain set of homonormative practices and ideas are prevalent in contemporary Poland, at least in its urban spaces. Secondly, whilst the frustration of Polish LGBT activists with the status quo is understandable and a certain level of 'activism fatigue' as Kinga described it, is not surprising considering that Polish LGBT organizations operate in a unceasingly hostile political environment (in particular in the context of PiS' gains over the last few years) there is something to be said about the critique of not participating in activism, a form of voluntary, unpaid labor. As I have argued in Chapter 3, the LGBT organizations in Poland carry the full burden of LGBT specific provision (providing legal, educational and support services) – effectively releasing the state from its burden of caring for its LGBT citizens. Whilst the work done by the third sector is important and clearly needed, it is very much symptomatic of an issue in which the state refuses to take responsibility for service provision to a group of people and the resulting gap in services is filled by unpaid labor; in effect responsibility is shifted away from the state and onto individual organizations and by extension, people. At the same time, such status quo makes the LGBT movement vulnerable, as it is relying on good will and private resources, which are finite; this is particularly true for smaller organizations, that also have less people involved in their operations. An example of how this results in a constant struggle, at times also for survival, is a LGBT organization in Łódź, which had been suspended and then 'reanimated' during the time of my fieldwork.

Moreover, Patrycja's implicit critique of people who choose to stay in the proverbial closet in their professional environment can be juxtaposed with



Sebastian's account of how he is not open about his sexuality at work, for he fears he would lose his job if he were to come out to his employer and how many of his friends are in a similar position, in particular those employed in education (Sebastian, member's of WiT, 2015). Whilst on the one hand this strongly suggests that in Poland for many LGBT people outness is not a viable option and it can indeed be a form of luxury, a privilege that few are granted; on the other hand it also points to the gap in effective state regulation and penalization of discrimination on the basis of one's sexuality in the workplace as well as lack of education on issues of sexual difference, whereby myths about homosexuality's links to pedophilia continue to circulate in the public sphere, as pointed out by Sebastian who listed the last aspect as an important reason why many gay men in particular choose not to disclose their sexuality at work.

Nevertheless, my interviews with Polish LGBT activists point to the fact that a locally specific form of homonormativity operates in the Polish context. It is not to say that the Polish LGBT movement itself is not complicit in reproducing homonormative ideas and practices – in particular if one takes into consideration the politics of location and demographics of the movement, (as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 7) or that legalizing same-sex unions have been amongst its unquestionable priorities. In particular making same-sex legal partnerships the focal point of LGBT emancipatory politics has been widely critiqued, as linked to ideas of privatization and self-regulation that consolidates the dominance of heteronormativity. To recap, Diane Richardson argues that:

In making citizenship rights for lesbians and gay men contingent on being in (good) gay couple relationships that appear to replicate but are not actually sanctioned as marriage, one could argue that this (re)asserts conventional sexual/gender values and the dominance of heterosexuality as a normatively better way of life (Richardson, 2004, p. 406)

In Poland, where same-sex union legislation proposals have failed repeatedly to get past the parliamentary vote (see Chapter 3) the citizenship rights for gays and lesbians have not materialized for good or any other kind of couples, nevertheless, the discourse of privileging of coupledness is ever-present and it is particularly strongly emphasized by WiT. Indeed, the stress on long-term monogamous relationships was a theme that came up very frequently in my

interviews with members of WiT and the following quotes are illustrative of the centrality of this concept to WiT's project:

*The only short programmatic sketch is that we support stable relationships, we promote them, but if someone decides that they would prefer to live in celibacy, be our guest, if someone decides, I don't know that they don't live in a stable relationship, but rather in many consecutive ones, or I don't know, they are polyamorous, then we do not support it, but we won't throw anyone out... We are not, if we ourselves have a different view we do not intend to kick others, who have yet another one (Sebastian, member of WiT, 2015).*

*We are all looking for relationships, faithful same-sex relationships, right? Not flings... [These are] certain values which can be shared, talked about [within WiT] (Adam, member of WiT, 2015; emphasis added)*

*We have some rules... and still some people object to that, why do we for instance support long-term relationships, and not everything, but, as we know, every group has some ideas, right? (Emilia, member of WiT, 2015; emphasis added).*

Such focus on monogamous, long-term relationships is perhaps not surprising considering the Christian character of the group, as fidelity and monogamy are central concepts in Christian understanding of coupledness, and it is these values that in a Christian worldview become sanctified in the sacrament of marriage. Thus, if we return to the main aims of WiT, as outlined above, working towards greater acceptance of LGBTQ people in the Church can only be achieved through demonstrating commitment to the values that the Church upholds. At the same time, it is not enough to declare these values as essential to one's worldview, for acceptance can only be achieved through disavowal of difference and this is in turn achieved through a) the discourse of normality of long-term monogamous lesbian and gay relationships and b) distancing from any form of subversive politics that might in the view of WiT members – undermine respectability. The strong focus on respectability resonates with Bev Skeggs' (1997) account of how working class women invest a lot of energy into being perceived as respectable, against the stigmatization of working class culture and lives in British society. Similarly, in a context that remains marked by high levels of homo-, bi- and transphobia, becoming respectable can be seen as central to claiming value.

The centrality of respectability is at times expressed in relation to the already mentioned equality parades as events that might compromise it, by either generating the wrong kind of attention for the LGBT community or

harming the particular cause of LGBT Christians by association with 'the wrong crowd'.

I don't go to [equality] parades, not only because I am not out, but also because I think they harm the cause... Because, when it comes to the cause – I am thinking about the *cause of LGBT Christians* – for instance, you march with politicians that I would not like to meet personally, with organizations that define themselves as... anticlerical, or atheistic (Sebastian, member of WiT, 2015; emphasis added).

Importantly, in the above quote what becomes clear is that LGBT Christians in Poland have goals that might not necessarily be the same as those of the Polish LGBT movement at large, as WiT continues to work for acceptance *within* the Church. Thus, for Sebastian, taking part in equality parades might undermine WiT's cause. However, some members of WiT, rather than distancing themselves from the parades, choose to reclaim them as spaces of respectability; a good example of this is Monika's account of the mental image she had of equality parades:

We've heard it so many times from heterosexual people that these marches are so colorful, flashy, that we [LGBT people] walk around half naked, that we began to believe in the stereotype, and I myself imagined the march like that for a while, and finally I watched some of it on YouTube... no one was naked, no one was in feathers, nobody flashed their boobs, nor asses and I was in shock (Focus group interview with Monika, Justyna, Kasia, Mariusz, Ewelina and Filip, members of WiT, 2015).

This framing of parades – through a feeling of profound surprise, of shock, at how 'normal' it looks – is significant as it delegitimizes these elements that *are* in fact feathers, nudity and flashiness.<sup>91</sup> In this context normality becomes a value in itself, while dissidence is dismissed as a cliché. In my interviews with WiT's members the discourse of normality was prominent and it was mobilized repeatedly. The quotes below illustrate this point well:

I prefer to concentrate on this, to talk about this, that LGBT community, that this is a *normal life*, that this is a *normal community*, that this *orientation is something normal* (Martyna, member of WiT, 2015).

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<sup>91</sup> Such reimagining of the parades as spaces of normative respectability is not limited to WiT's members and it became consequential when Marta Konarzewska, famous LGBT activist, was asked to leave the 2015 Warsaw Equality Parade as the organizers of the event found her naked upper body (with covered nipples) offensive (Kuryło, 2015).

In general, precisely what KPH [*Kampania Przeciw Homofobii*, Campaign against homophobia] did - 'Let them see us', that was quite catchy, and cool, I'd say that they finally came up with something smart there, and it was really so 'Let them see us', let them see how we work and *live*<sup>92</sup> normally... [We are] *normal*. We go to work, we work, we keep houses – *normal life* (Marcin, member of WiT, 2015).

Interestingly, the campaign Marcin refers to has been met with critiques for its homonormative character (see for example Majka, 2008/2009). What is of relevance here is however that in the quotes above normality also has another function – it erases difference, and *normal* becomes *the same* as heterosexual. The attachment to normality understood as sameness with heterosexual couples becomes even more explicit in the comparisons made by Marcin when describing a past relationship:

*We acted normally, as most hetero couples*, that is we did not flaunt our sexuality, these kind of matters were dealt with at home, right? That's what the home is for... right? Simply not flaunting it, not making a show out of it, or [pauses]. These are our private affairs... the same as our neighbors live here, and they are also not flaunting it, the fact that they are together, of course, everyone knows that they live together, they are married, I don't know for 30 or 40 years, right? (Marcin, member of WiT, 2015; emphasis added)

Such investment into the discourse of normality could be considered strategic in a context where LGBT people are denied rights, as is the case of Poland today and where historically LGBT people have been stigmatized as deviant. At the same time, however, in the case of WiT, paired with the emphasis on respectability, long-term monogamy, and disowning of sexual dissidence it becomes an element of something bigger, of a worldview and of particular type of politics, which I choose to conceptualize in terms of – paraphrasing Lynne Gerber's godly masculinity (2015) – godly homonormativity. WiT's godly homonormativity as I understand it differs from 'mainstream' homonormative ideas and practices inasmuch as the emphasis on consumption is largely absent and there is a greater focus on community (although the extent to which this is a feature contingent on the support group role of WiT remains to be seen), what it has in common with homonormativity is that it leaves the (hetero)norm unchallenged whilst promoting a self-governance (through the disciplining

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92 Marcin uses two separate words '*żyjemy*' and '*mieszkamy*' which both translate as '*we live*'; '*mieszkamy*' however refers to living in a space, dwelling, or residing.

discourse of respectability) and gay and lesbian life grounded in monogamous domesticity. In the words of Sebastian:

There is no such a thing as gay subculture, so if a priest tells me over and over again about the gay lifestyle, I have a question, I pray the rosary<sup>93</sup>, right, does this fit the stereotype of a gay? Right? I go to church and pray the rosary with my partner, that's our '*gay lifestyle*'<sup>94</sup> (Sebastian, member of WiT, 2015).

Whilst, unlike in the mainstream homonormative practices, the focus is not explicitly on individualism and consumption, there is a strong undercurrent of self-responsibilizing and self-disciplining impulses and it is also not difficult to see how the ideal of monogamous coupledness can for example serve as a basis for privatization of care. Consequently, even if godly homonormativity might trouble the mainstream homonormative ideas in some respect, as its linkages to neoliberal ideals are less linear, in effect their social and political effects are strikingly similar.

Finally, if the godly homonormativity of WiT can be seen as resulting from the desire for assimilation within the Church – an institution that is a prime example of heteronormative, patriarchal, sexist and conservative practices and ideas – which can arguably only be achieved through 'sameness', then the ultimate success of politics of godly homonormativity would be Church endorsed same-sex marriage. If homonormativity is the politics that means that gays go home and cook dinner forever, to draw on Duggan's (2003) metaphor, godly homonormativity means that they go home, cook dinner and pray forever. What it means for the politics of LGBT emancipation in Poland remains to be seen, it is however plausible that it generates conservative ideas around what it means to be LGBT in Poland today. Importantly, my point is not that the godly homonormativity of WiT replaces or even challenges other homonormative practices; rather, it coexists with them, colluding with them on some points, while being distinct on others.

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<sup>93</sup> A form of devotion in Roman Catholicism where 'five (or fifteen) decades of Hail Marys are repeated, each decade preceded by an Our Father and followed by a Glory Be' (Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2017).

<sup>94</sup> Sebastian uses the English phrase 'gay lifestyle' here.

#### **5.4. Pushing the boundaries for LGBT Christians within Church-endorsed heterosexual primacy**

In this chapter I discussed the particular positionality of Polish LGBT Christians drawing on interviews with members of WiT and LGBT activists. I mapped out the exclusions that LGBT Christians face within the broader LGBT movement and demonstrated how WiT members collectively and on an individual level resist these. I then examined the gendered limits of WiT's project and pointed to the ways in which the group is generative of a new form of homonormative ideas and practices that I term godly homonormativity.

The historical reality of the Polish LGBT movement makes it intimately linked to the emergence of neoliberal politics in Poland post 1989 – with a limited scope for emancipatory politics under the state socialism it is perhaps not surprising that it is homonormative ideas that became prevalent; it is arguably even less surprising that a Christian LGBT group would become generative of an even more conservative form of homonormative politics. As noted by Brown, 'the consequences of neoliberal policies are uneven and spatially specific (G. Brown, 2012, p. 1070), and the emergence of WiT's godly homonormativity is an example of such local specificity. What is significant is that WiT's godly homonormativity is a perfect example of the kind of politics that are fostered at a junction of neoliberalization and traditional, patriarchal regimes of power and its success will arguably depend on the survival of both. Whilst I develop some of the themes signaled above, in particular those of class and location, in more detail in Chapter 7, in the next chapter I examine a different empirical site within the landscape of contemporary Polish politics of sexuality, where effects of neoliberalization and patriarchal gender relations also collude, namely, the practice of reparative therapy.

## Chapter 6: The Self-Governed And Self-Disciplined (Male) Self Of Reparative Therapy

### 6.1 Introduction

Do not treat homosexual tendencies as something that cannot be changed. Because it is the same as telling a poor person: 'Man, you were born poor and you will stay that way. There is no point to work, because you will never make it' But it is possible to make it and become rich (Miłosz's testimony, *Pomoc 2002*, 2015).

In Chapter 5 I discussed the ways in which Polish LGBT Christians negotiate their particular subject positions within the Polish LGBT movement. I demonstrate how the latter is often positioned in an openly antagonistic relation to religion, in particular to Roman Catholicism. I then argue that the LGBT Christian group *Wiara i Tęcza* can therefore be seen as an effort to overcome the exclusion of LGBT Christians from mainstream LGBT organizing in Poland. At the same time, I investigate the particular gender politics of WiT, which – I argue – combined with its strong emphasis on coupledness and narrative of normality produce a new set of homonormative ideas and ideals that consolidate rather than challenge the heteronorm; I term these *godly homonormativity*. In this chapter, I continue examining the ways in which sexuality and gender intersect in Poland today, shifting my focus to Reparative Therapy (RT) programmes offered exclusively to Christian gay and bisexual men by three separate groups *Pascha*, *Odwaga*, and *Pomoc 2002*. Whilst there are several differences between the three groups under scrutiny here – including in terms of the financial cost of participating in them, the involvement of 'experts' and the level of cooperation with the Catholic Church – and I return to these differences in Chapter 7, for the purpose of this chapter I choose to read for similarities between them. As outlined in Chapter 1, these similarities include in particular their aims (helping individuals to deal with 'unwanted same sex attraction'), their ideological foundations (a conviction that homosexuality is a treatable disorder, as discussed in Chapter 3), their gender politics, and their methods – it is these two last aspects I analyze in detail below.

Thus, this chapter engages with a different site of negotiations over politics of sexuality, a site where gender is thrown into even sharper relief than it was the case with Christian LGBT organizing. Consequently, in this chapter I draw predominantly on my interviews with men who took part in the programmes of *Pascha*, *Pomoc 2002* and *Odwaga*, and, to a lesser extent, on secondary materials in the form of testimonies published on the websites of these groups.

I argue that in order to make sense of RT, we need to view it in relation to the neoliberal discourses of the self – responsabilization and individualization – which in RT are extended onto questions of sexual orientation, or rather, more fittingly, sexual re-orientation. As I illustrate below, RT is a technology of the self that operates at an intersection of the religious practice and the secular practice of therapy, and to be done correctly it requires relevant expertise, and experts, even though its results, and in particular, its failures are then individualized. Whilst I also demonstrate how the process is enabled through the particular investments neoliberal subjects have in expert knowledge as the source of 'truth' about themselves, my argument is that RT exemplifies how neoliberal ideas of the self intermingle with existing regimes of self-governance and patriarchal power. The traditional, heterosexist and male-centered ideas around gender roles and family exemplify the latter. Finally, I also discuss the way in which RT exposes certain subjects to potentially dangerous practices that for some cause long-term damage, as it adds to their feelings of maladjustment and lack of self-acceptance.

Before I move on with my analysis there is however a methodological and epistemological issue related specifically to the above-mentioned testimonies that I want to address and it is this point I turn my attention to next.

### **6.1.1. Testimonies**

Prior to undertaking my fieldwork in Poland (conducted June 2015 – April 2016), I collected and analyzed secondary data on the three groups in question here (see Chapter 4 for more detail on the scope of these). Part of the process included analyzing the range of testimonies left on their websites from people who have supposedly benefitted from the programmes these groups offer (see



Appendix 5 for a full list of testimonies quoted). From the start, there were two issues that complicated the use of these testimonies as data. Firstly and perhaps most obviously, there is the question of their veracity, as there is no way of verifying that the testimonies presented are written by actual participants and not the people in charge of the groups. Secondly, the very idea of a testimony as a form of fixed in time account of the self is problematic precisely because it does just that, fixes it in time, denying it any right for reevaluation. Having discussed the matter of testimonies with past participants of RT groups, I was reassured that the testimonies are indeed written by actual participants at least in the case of *Pascha*. At the same time the matter of their fixity was brought up and I think it is important to acknowledge it; the following quote captures the issue very well and is worth citing at length:

In my opinion they are authentic... They are the testimonies of the chosen ones, right...? There is also the question of writing a testimony, it is not done from a long-term perspective, it is done in a given moment, [capturing] how this person feels, what he is struggling with, what he has achieved... Sometimes they can also unfortunately be... wishful thinking testimonies, that [I imagine] I am the one who made it, I succeeded and I don't verify it too deeply... just in case, but I verify it in relation to how it fits within the framework of success and how much I believe in my own success. Because, probably, there is no room for doubt in these testimonies... this person has days when he is possibly wondering whether he made a mistake, right...? This factor is not included in testimonies, that people are not that simple, that if you catch something once it will be there for the rest of your life (Kamil, past RT participant, 2015).

There is a lot to be said about Kamil's rich account above, however, what is of particular relevance at this point is how it captures the inherent instability involved in the process of writing a testimony, as well as how it signals the success bias of the pieces selected for publication. To use the testimonies, these limited and partial accounts of people's experiences must therefore be done with caution. Consequently, I use them less as personal accounts of actual success and narratives of the 'truth' and more as repositories of ideas of what success and working towards it is imagined to look like – as stories carefully selected for publishing by the people behind the RT groups to convey a message, to both validate their work and to advertise it in order to entice new participants.

The online testimonies are also useful inasmuch as they actively construct a narrative of *what it means* to be homosexual, mapping out the way in which RT groups in Poland understand the issue. In the twenty testimonies

taken from the websites of the RT groups in question the most prevalent motifs are a) suffering and b) personal responsibility for the success of reorientation efforts, and hard work necessary for achieving the same. I return to the issues of responsabilization and effort below, but would like to take some time here to address the issue of how suffering is constructed as intrinsic to being gay and as a direct consequence thereof. One of the testimonies reads:

I always felt worse, inferior and when additionally homosexual feelings came, and in general problems with sexuality, my feelings of inferiority deepened (Maciek's testimony, *Pascha*, 2015).

In another one the author states:

To realize at some point in your life, how low you have fallen and that you are a total zero and that it cannot go on like that, it causes a shock... I am really ashamed of all that... (Jędreń's testimony, *Pomoc 2002*, 2010).

And yet another one:

Even couple of months ago you would read here: 'I am nobody, I am trash, unworthy of any care or love; I am homosexual' (Marek's testimony, *Pomoc 2002*, 2015).

Again, such sentiments are not unusual; the testimonies left on RT groups' websites are full of pain, guilt, and feelings of distress, isolation, worthlessness, and self-loathing. The way in which they are narrated constructs the individual experience of homosexuality as the source of all misery, and importantly, as entirely detached from external pressures of living in a heteronormative society, or having to negotiate the demands of a heterosexist religion. André Grace calls these kind of testimonies in the US 'stories of hatred of the homosexual self' and argues that they are misleading in their historical, social, cultural, and political decontextualization, as what they fail 'to comprehend and address... is the hegemonic construction of heteronormativity' (2008, p. 551). Omitting, deliberately or not, that part of the story in which being homosexual in a hostile environment might be extremely challenging and a source of trauma conceals the structural causes of inequality, to put it bluntly, it confuses the symptoms with the cause.

Moreover, there is a gendered aspect to RT that is also reflected in the testimonies; of all the three groups only *Odwaga* features testimonies written by women. However, these are not first hand narratives of unwanted female homosexual desire, rather they are what I would classify as supportive statements: one is written by a person who married a man who experienced unwanted same sex attraction and the second one is written by a mother of a man who struggles with homosexuality. I return to these later on in the chapter. What is worth signaling here however is that the testimonies also serve as accounts of the gendered, patriarchal order RT also aims to restore and maintain.

Nevertheless, the main message of RT is the promise to alleviate the suffering brought about by homosexuality, to restore and fix what has been damaged through a combined, long-term effort, a therapeutic exercise in self-mastery and it is this aspect of the phenomenon I discuss next, locating it within both the broader context of neoliberal ideas of the self and the specific meaning these mobilize in the context of post-socialist Poland.

### **6.3 RT as a technology for self-governance**

Individual therapy was encouraged... or group therapy - it was not enough with the group meetings in Pascha, [it was expected] that we would work regardless of these, and the contact with religion, with faith, with God, it had to be active rather than passive... One of the elements was also that you had to find a spiritual guide and a therapist... (Piotr, past RT participant, 2016).

[T]herapeutic governance constructs clients' problems internal to the self, which like other individualizing forms of governance, obscures structural inequality (McKim, 2008, p. 321).

In Chapter 3 I discuss the origins and current status of RT as a practice and theory pointing out how it has been critiqued and dismissed as an ideology masquerading as science. If this metaphor were to be extended, one could say that the clothes that RT is dressed up in belong undoubtedly to psycho-sciences. It is through the heritage, vocabulary and methods of psycho-sciences that RT becomes intelligible and it is through them it makes its claims to validity. The same is undoubtedly true for RT in Poland – the methods used and structures within which these are applied are a combination of group and individual

therapy. Consequently, *Odwaga's* two tier programme starts with a support group, before one is allowed to move on to a therapeutic group; *Pascha's* members are expected to find a therapist, and a spiritual guide, as well as to regularly attend group meetings; whilst *Pomoc 2002* is based on individual and group therapy as managed by its leader; all groups organize therapeutic/religious retreats for their members that include a range of group and individual therapy sessions as well as religious rituals, such as mass, group prayer, etc.

As discussed in Chapter 2, I consider the work of Nicholas Rose particularly suited to analyzing RT. To briefly recap, Rose investigates how the psycho-sciences, influence the ways in which we think of ourselves and of our lives. His argument is that psycho-sciences 'make it possible for all of us to make a project out of our biography', yet the sense of autonomy they offer comes with 'a constant and intense self-scrutiny, a continual evaluation of our personal experiences, emotions and feelings in relation to images of satisfaction' (Rose, 1999a, p. 258). Rose argues that through the psychotherapeutics 'selves dissatisfied with who they are can engage in projects to refurbish and reshape themselves in the directions they desire' (ibid. p. 232); a point that is of particular relevance in relation to RT's project of restoring of the heterosexual self. RT is a project that individuals embark on and a one that requires a huge amount of effort and dedication. As evidenced in the quotes below taken from online testimonies, success of this project is dependent first and foremost upon individual work done by the participants:

The decision to join a group, but most of all asking for help and *daily work with oneself*... they require courage and heroism... it's better to change oneself than to expect others to change... Nobody promised me a pie in the sky, if anything I was warned that the road will be long and nothing is guaranteed (Romek's testimony, *Pascha*, 2013; emphasis added).

Faith, *work on oneself*, stubbornness, not giving up in difficult situations and giving oneself a bit of time really helps... It took me 6 years, but of course you can do it in a relatively shorter time. *It depends on you*, on your engagement and on drawing conclusions from each fall (Jędreń's testimony, *Pomoc 2002*, 2010; emphasis added).

My interviews with men who took part in the RT programmes in Poland also confirm that the idea of personal responsibility and commitment are central to how taking part in an RT group is understood, and approached. It might be

argued that RT's promise is attractive precisely because it resonates with the familiar notion that people are in a position to influence their fate and lives if only they try and work hard enough. Kamil aptly describes how Pascha's programme and RT theories appealed to him at the time of joining the group:

Actually, the programme was convincing, that [idea], that it's possible to change something, and that, so to speak, it is within reach, depending on how much work we put into it, and our own commitment, so it simply did convince me (Kamil, past RT participant, 2015).

Consequently, the responsibility for bringing about the change and for shaping one's own destiny is placed with an individual and their ability to face up to the challenge, adapt and take appropriate action, down to – as I demonstrate next – the most minute choices; a notion that chimes with the neoliberal vision of the personhood I discuss in Chapter 2. Thus, it is up to the participants to find a therapist, to make sure they attend the group meetings, to remain in touch with their spiritual guide, to regularly attend religious services and confess, and to apply the guidelines of the group to their everyday lives. The message of RT is a clear-cut one: it is all in your hands, you are the maker and sole owner of your success, and relatedly, if you fail you only have yourself to blame.

### **6.3.1 Disciplining the self**

For me... the first contact with the group was in a way symbolic... I travelled to the mountains and the conditions were still winter-like and I trekked on an unblazed trail, cause somehow that was the one I picked, and it was a very hard and difficult trail. Why am I talking about this? Cause in a way, to me, it later became a symbol of work on myself in the group, that it was going to be a very difficult task, slow and painful, demanding many sacrifices and simply difficult - I think this is a right word – a difficult experience (Kamil, past RT participant, 2015).

The duty to have a spiritual guide, most often a priest, as well as a therapist (as mandated by *Pascha*), and the regular meetings with the group provide the framework within which RT is administered, it is however in the souls, bodies and the bedrooms of RT participants that the real work is taking place. The level of detail and self-scrutiny required is illustrated well by the original daily score card one of the participants brought to the interview; filling it out was part of his participation in Pascha's programme (Fig. 6.1). The score card starts with the

question 'Have you done your homework?' and gives a 1-10 scale on which one is to self-assess one's performance within the listed daily tasks ('Codzienne zadania', column 1, in Fig. 1) throughout each day of the week (columns 2-8); the tasks translate as follows: caffeine free, healthy food, sleep, physical exercise, prayer, gratitude, reading of the Scripture, meditation, visualization of the goal, keeping a diary, responsibility/confession, healthy risk taking, expressing one's emotions, openness, honesty, being of service/giving, social relation, entertainment, sexual purity, homosexual arousal, other. What is also interesting here is that on the scale given, '1' does not simply stand for failure, but rather, it is described as a 'serious amount of work needed', urging the participant to make more effort. This comprehensive system of self-monitoring of the body and soul is illustrative of the approach at heart of RT programmes that demand huge amount of discipline, self-scrutiny and commitment.

Figure 6.1. Daily score card from *Pascha*

Imię..... tydzień (data).....

Czy wykonałeś pracę domową? TAK NIE

Oceń siebie w skali 1-10 w podanych niżej kategoriach:  
1 = trzeba wziąć się do solidnej pracy / 10 = doskonale

Codzienne zadania	pn	wt	śr	czw	Pt	sb	nd
✓ Bez kafeiny							
✓ Zdrowe jedzenie							
✓ Sen							
✓ Ćwiczenia fizyczne							
✓ Modlitwa							
✓ Wdzięczność							
✓ Lektura duchowa/Pismo Święte							
✓ Medytacja							
✓ Wizualizacja (celu)							
✓ Pisanie dziennika							
✓ Odpowiedzialność/snowiedź							
✓ Zdrowe podejmowanie ryzyka							
✓ Wyrażanie emocji							
✓ Otwartość							
✓ Uczciwość							
✓ Służenie/dawanie							
✓ Związki towarzyskie							
✓ Rozrywka							
✓ Czystość seksualna							
✓ Pobudzenie homoseksualne							
✓ Inne							

Source: Interview with past participant of *Pascha*.

The idea of individual, long-term effort and exercise in self-control that the above score card represents is reiterated in the interviews conducted with past participants of RT groups. Indeed, one of the participants, who used to run a

support group in *Odwaga*, compared the multifaceted work required to change one's sexual orientation to that of the training of an Olympian (Wojciech, past RT group organizer, 2015). By breaking the task into smaller, arguably more manageable ones, participants can exercise a level of control over their bodies and minds through a set of everyday operations and choices. However, and importantly, daily monitoring of the 'tasks' is done not for the purpose of external validation – the above-mentioned score card for instance was not assessed by or shared with others – assessment and validation happen internally, making RT a perfect example of exercise in self-awareness and self-management, aimed at remaking of the self. What is needed is discipline and resolve. However, at times, even with a full commitment, the changes that take place for some are not the ones that RT promises; Aleksander, owner of the above pictured score card discusses the results of the long-term mental and physical effort undertaken thusly:

I almost got my homosexual feelings down to zero... because, if you do not watch TV... at the time I had no internet, I was reading those [RT] books, I got up early, I went to mass, I read the Bible, I ate correctly, I lived frugally, so it is natural that your sexual drive can be easier tamed, when you do not provide it with any stimuli, if you don't go to clubs, avoid nudity (Aleksander, past RT participant, 2015).

What happened to Aleksander was that he managed to suppress his sexual drive, yet as he puts it himself 'it was the going from zero to plus' meaning feeling sexually attracted to women that proved undoable for him (Aleksander, past RT participant, 2015). Aleksander compares the whole process of RT to Pavlov's famous experiment: 'Like Pavlov's dog, right? Behaviorism, isn't it? So, repeat, repeat, repeat until you get over it [homosexuality]', where the actual desired result never materializes (ibid.). What is clear is that a lot of physical, mental and emotional work is required to 'do' RT properly. At the same time the multitude of tasks to both monitor and perform make it a site that is set up for failure for most. And even those who commit to this superhuman effort and comply with the demands placed on them are left with doubts to whether they have in fact done enough, or whether they are actually there yet, in particular if the change did not materialize. Aleksander illustrates this well when he describes his self-assessment of the programme he took part in:

There was this option that when someone feels ready to leave the group, there was this table to fill out. And I looked at it, and initially it surprised me... I had it all... I couldn't find any shortcomings in myself (Aleksander, past participant of RT, 2015).

Nevertheless, what is clear is that from avoiding caffeine, to a ban on masturbation RT programmes are exercises in self-management. When all is said and done the failure to change one's orientation is constructed as a result of one's own inability to work, try and pray hard enough, leaving the essential injustice of the practice intact. In that sense and to go back to the metaphor of the poor man that the opening quote of this chapter mobilizes, RT leaves poor men poor, often with the feeling that their continuous misery is down to their own inability to strive harder. I come back to this aspect of the practice below, but what I want to discuss next is the group character of RT.

### **6.3.2 RT as a group practice**

The centrality of self-discipline to the project of RT is consolidated through compulsory group retreats, where participants are expected to take part in a tightly packed programme of religious rituals, therapy and sport. As described by Bartek:

They were formative meetings; let's call them religious, psychotherapeutic ones... There was of course also physical activity, obviously early in the morning, as it would be done in a military camp (Bartek, past participant of RT 2016).

At the same time, it is through the retreats and regular contact with the groups that participants can share, compare and assess their progress. Nevertheless, the participants of this study have largely described the social aspects of being a member of an RT group as a positive experience and many have formed lasting friendships with other group members that outlived their commitment to reorientation efforts. For many contact with the group was the first time they would meet people who like them were struggling to reconcile their faith with their sexuality and were determined to do something about it. At times it was also the first time ever that they would have met other homosexual men, a point



that I will return to in Chapter 7 where I talk about questions of location and access to LGBT spaces and organizations. What is however also important in relation to RT as a group practice is its responsabilizing nature that obliges one to confess to one's peers. This is not unlike mainstream group therapy; Rose describes the dynamics at work in a therapeutic group thusly:

[C]ircle of chairs in a therapeutic group... constitute[s] the subject as one responsible to its self because it is responsible to others, incorporating each person into a democratic field of confession and judgment (Rose, 1999a, p. 250).

Similarly, by joining an RT group, people implicitly agree to enter such circle of confession and judgment and to subject themselves to a collective scrutiny, and surveillance at a level previously unknown to them. Indeed, for some participants the level of disclosure expected in the group was difficult at first, as described by Piotr:

Piotr: To open up [to the group] to talk about one's problems...That was the biggest challenge...

MM: Were there many situations when this was required?

Piotr: No, nobody was forcing anyone really... We met in the group and everyone who wanted could talk about themselves, but it was not necessary. But if someone does not talk about themselves, well then generally they don't benefit from certain things, right? (Piotr, past participant of RT, 2016).

What I find interesting in Piotr's account is how it captures the subtle ways in which the obligation to share with the group is made into a personal choice to do so. Once the discomfort of disclosure is overcome the group becomes a space for sharing as well as a site of investment, where the benefits you reap are proportional to how much you are willing to 'invest' meaning also, to disclose and reveal. At the same time, the expectation that one discloses the most intimate details of one's life functions as a disciplining mechanism and the group also has the right to exclude someone who they see as not committed enough, based for instance on attendance, this point is particularly valid for *Pascha* which has more of a democratic character compared to the two other groups.<sup>95</sup> But for all three groups in question, taking part in group therapy

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<sup>95</sup> In *Pascha* the local operations of the groups are run by leaders selected from the participants by the people in charge of the whole project.

means that participants monitor themselves as well as other members of the group.

The level of control exercised by the group can also take a more oppressive form as in *Pomoc 2002*, where the participants were expected to not only report whether they masturbate, but were also financially penalized when they did.

Rafał: I found out that you have to pay if you masturbate; it was 75 or 150 zlotys, something like this...

MM: Depending on?

Rafał: [...] I think it was like that... that if you feel the need to masturbate then you can call another member of the group, and if I call and then do it [masturbate] it would cost 75 zlotys, and if I won't call and masturbate then it's 150 (Rafał, past participant of RT, 2015).

Despite the obvious issue with the ethics of such practice (the money goes to the group's leader and founder) what is important to point out here is the at least seemingly voluntary character of this rule; once again it is left up to the individual to self-report to his peers and face the consequences. The control happens at an individual level, it is thus only effective when its mechanisms and rationale are internalized, here again, self-governance is enacted. But what are the actual results of such efforts to self-govern and manage through RT, and what effect does it have on the people who decide to undergo its difficult and demanding process? It is these questions that I engage with to next.

#### **6.4 Lasting damage of RT**

I made the effort of working on myself, and definitely I developed somehow... Certainly there was a moment when I regretted, I mean, regretted that it did not work, right? And I was wondering why [it didn't] (Kamil, past RT participant, 2015).

None of the past RT participants of this study reported having been 'cured' in the process, even if one of them was in fact married to a woman and has started a family at the time of the interview. In the logic of RT heterosexual marriage epitomizes success – a point I return to in the next section of this chapter – and during the interview we discussed how this participant's example might and in

fact *has* been used as a success story of sexual reorientation, despite the fact that he self-identifies as bisexual and his choice to get married was motivated by his strong desire to have a family (Piotr, past RT participant, 2016). At the same time, most of the participants were quite outspoken about the damage done by the practice of RT, even if at times, they were also able to find some positive aspects of their engagement with the groups, or some parts of the therapeutic process. Many stressed the way in which having ‘failed’ at RT they went through a prolonged period of self-doubt and at times also depression. Some were able to move on from the experience but years later still felt that what happened to them in the process of RT was a form of injustice, particularly in relation to what they saw as the empty promises that were made to them. This point is well illustrated by Aleksander’s account of how he sees his experience of being in *Pomoc 2002* and then in *Pascha* retrospectively:

[T]his promising, it's a huge injustice [pauses]. I have experienced a certain injustice. Promising young people – cause I was young, religious – [so] making these empty promises... Promising changes... Here a proposal is made, that we *know* [the causes of homosexuality] and we *know* how to cure it, right? (Aleksander, past RT participant, 2015; emphasis in original)

For people like Aleksander it was important to take part in this study as he saw it as attending to some unfinished business he had with the organizations that he felt had wronged him. On another occasion a different participant told me that agreeing to meet with me and discuss the time in RT was a form of providing closure for what had been a difficult and eventually a deeply disappointing experience; a quote from Szymon illustrates this further:

I spent a long time trying to figure out what happened there [in the RT group]. I think I am still working on it, so when I got the email [from another participant who recruited Szymon for the study] I thought, right, it's time to get this out and done with once and for all (Szymon, past RT participant, 2016).

Furthermore, even if some participants have come to accept their sexuality, others were still struggling with it years after they stopped RT. Whilst some saw RT as a difficult but somehow necessary part of their self-acceptance process, whereby having tried it allowed them to finally dismiss it and rethink the way they saw themselves – others felt that it was a setback that deepened their feelings of maladjustment and left them confused, hurt or angry – at times

at themselves. For example, Bartek considers his inability to form a happy homosexual relationship, to be one of the lasting consequences of RT, and he links it to the internalization of homophobia that taking part in an RT group consolidated. He considers this to be the case not just for him, but also for other men he met in the process:

Bartek: A large part of people remain in this state of suspension,<sup>96</sup> so they either don't accept themselves and still try do something about it... or they simply live as singles. The least is in relationships, in some kind of relatively stable homosexual ones... so the majority are the people who, who let's say are lonely, and with a various levels of acceptance or non-acceptance of who they are...

MM: Do you think that this is a result of being in this kind of group?

Bartek: I think so, well, I think [pauses]... Somebody I know said that if someone has actually tried reparative therapy they will never be happy in a homosexual relationship and I would kind of agree with that. I can see it on my own example, the difficulties I have... the homophobe in me, a little internalized one is still working (Interview with Bartek, past participant of RT, 2016).

What is also important to acknowledge here, is the extent to which some of the participants of RT, having fallen for its promise, internalized its message to the point that the failure of the reorientation efforts became experienced as a personal one, leaving them with the sense that if only they did something else, something more, it would work and they would in fact become straight; this point is also illustrated by Bartek's account:

Right now I see it [RT] differently, but *it is still somewhere there inside of me. Something like this, this thinking that maybe if I did something more, I would be normal...* (Bartek, past participant of RT, 2016; emphasis added).

I think this is of particular relevance in relation to the ways in which RT as a practice and an ideology colludes with individualizing neoliberal ideals of self-governance. What it also signals is how responsabilization and individualization cause real damage to people subjected to their logic. What people are left with is a sense of personal failure rather than a realization that what they were promised was close to, if not entirely unachievable, whilst the structural inequality that the practice of RT rests upon goes unchallenged. This idea is captured well by *Pascha's* metaphorical use of K2 (Kilimanjaro 2). On

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<sup>96</sup> The term used here is '*w stanie zawieszania*'.

*Pascha's* website we can read that 'each participant of *Pascha* is climbing his own personal K2... the climb to the top is so hard that it often requires the highest of sacrifices' (Pascha, 2017). Kamil's reflections over the metaphorical use of K2 point at its paradoxical character:

Kamil: There is this K2 [metaphor]... so weird that K2 was employed to do this job [of representing *Pascha's* programme]... probably they were not aware of it, or they knew nothing about mountains, but it's one of the most inaccessible mountains in the world, specially in winter no one has ever climbed it.

MM: Maybe it was a conscious choice?

Kamil: Maybe... I would say the Holy Spirit was watching over it... the intentions were probably good, things [that are] not necessarily achievable and all, but K2 is something practically unattainable for most people. Paradoxically... (Kamil, past RT participant, 2015).

As paradoxical as Kamil finds the comparison between *Pascha's* programme and K2, it can be argued that it makes perfect sense at conveying the logic of RT, shifting the burden of effectiveness from the structure onto the individual – for just as you would not blame a mountain for your inability to climb it, you cannot blame the group, or the idea it is built on for your failure to achieve the goal of reorientation.

#### **6.4. On Mothers, Wives And Virgin Mary**

From the three groups in question, only *Odwaga* used to run a support group for women and to my best knowledge it no longer does so. Returning to the argument made in Chapter 5, that female homosexuality appears to be of lesser concern to the Church because of women's subordinate position within it, it can be argued that this makes women partially invisible also to the practices of RT, where the focus is on men and male homosexual desire. Similarly to the way in which in the Roman Catholic Church women are relegated to the background, playing supportive roles, in the narrative of RT groups in Poland, women figure only as second plan characters, defined by their relationship to men, as mothers or wives. This is directly reflected in the only two female testimonies on *Odwaga's* website. The first one is an account of a mother, indeed signed simply *Matka* 'Mother' whose son is undergoing RT in *Odwaga*; it is a

narrative of initial shock and pain followed by cautious optimism for the future which would hopefully bring reorientation. The testimony ends with an acknowledgement of the value of the experience Mother is going through. Interestingly, Mother's testimony is followed by a similar account from a man, a father, whose account is signed 'Henryk'. As minute as such a difference might appear, using a first name in the case of the man, but identifying the woman by her social role and relationship to the participant is symbolic of the way RT positions women as secondary to men and validated only through their instrumental value to men, where they do not need to be identified beyond their relationship to them. In the story of RT, the mothers and wives are thus more of archetypes than actual people with desires and minds of their own.

The first figure – that of a mother – in the online testimonies written by men on RT groups' websites is often constructed as either overprotective, or otherwise dysfunctional, in particular if her male partner abandoned her, or if he was otherwise absent from his son's life. Thus, the mother is the indirect cause of her son's 'condition', an overbearing female influence that stunts the growth of healthy masculinity and needs distancing from. This is well illustrated in Patryk's testimony:

I realized that my father's presence was missing from my childhood. He would come back home tired, sometimes drunk. He had no time for me, so he did not teach me how to fish, play football and do other manly thing. I did not want to be like him, so I was clutching on to my mother, who unconsciously turned me into a woman, showed me how to wash clothes, cook and clean. At school I got on best with girls, for them I was probably one of their girlfriends. This female world filled up my life... The cause of your homosexual tendencies could be similar to mine. Your emotional development stopped at the time when you needed your father's love and attention (Patryk's testimony, *Pomoc 2002*, 2016).

The picture that is constructed in the narrative above is that of traditional patriarchal order in which it is the woman who exclusively carries the burden of the domestic labor, it is also a picture that denigrates the same, positioning it as not only unsuitable for men, but also directly threatening to their growth as heterosexual men. Whilst in Patryk's account it is the father's absence that ultimately causes homosexual tendencies, the mother's role is complicit, simply by the virtue of her female presence. Homosexuality is here understood as a deficit of masculinity, one that can be restored through RT and undoing of all the female conditioning.

The second figure, the wife, has two functions to fulfill. On the one hand she becomes a goal, a trophy, an evidence of success and an embodied proof of efficacy of RT. On the other hand she is expected to be selfless, forgiving, accepting and supporting her husband on his journey towards heterosexuality. The point that women are seen as instrumental in reasserting one's (hetero)sexuality became painfully visible when one of the past participants of *Odwaga* accounted that he was directly encouraged by the people in charge of the group to get married upon completion of the programme. When he pointed out that he 'does not feel it', he was advised to find a wife, who like Virgin Mary, would sacrifice and accept everything (Tomasz, past RT participant, 2015). Indeed, in the second testimony by a woman on *Odwaga's* website that selfless attitude that women are expected to assume is illustrated particularly well:

Soon after we met Krzysztof told me about his problem [homosexual tendencies]... he said that he hopes God has prepared me for what I am about to hear... I consented to this relationship, even though it was hard... I have had some tough days, a lot of tears, cause Krzysztof was in therapy and was going through a lot. One day for example he told me that he is unable to see me for now because he has an overload of femininity. I felt horrible then, but I knew that it takes time... That it is too much for him. That I have to let him be, when he needs it and hope the Lord will change it... I knew that we might break up, or that I would need to wait for 10 years for something to change, or clarify. We did not say that we were together then. Krzysztof was unable to introduce me as his girlfriend he used to say I'm his friend. (Kamila's testimony on *Odwaga's* website, 2017).

Kamila ends her account by describing how happy she is in her marriage now, with two children and how even though her relationship with Krzysztof began as a struggle, it was all worth it in the end. In her account she is the patient, understanding one, making no claims and no demands, and her needs are clearly subordinated to the needs of Krzysztof. What this account point to is an interesting tension, whereby notions of a self-made individual collude with existing patriarchal order. Thus, even though RT is grounded in the ideas of an independent and individualized self the ideal of femininity reproduced here is based on ideas of self-sacrifice, selflessness and devotion, illuminating the gendered double standard of the practice. Hence, RT is ultimately a male-biased and male-orientated practice, and ideology that subordinates women's needs. The overall message of RT groups in Poland is based on the assumption that

*men* can exercise control over their lives, including their sexuality, replicating an idea of personhood that is consistent with political rationality of neoliberalism, which as scholars have shown has its own gendered, raced and classed blind spots (Dawson, 2012; McKim, 2008; Michael Savage, 2000; Skeggs, 1997, 2004).

Moreover, the promise of RT might be false, but the side lining and instrumentalizing of women this practice epitomizes has real consequences, that are both discriminatory and harmful. To get married and have a family is posed as the most desirable and optimal outcome of RT and as signaled by Tomasz above, it appears to be advocated *regardless* of the actual desires of participants, which besides being highly problematic from an ethical point of view, might again have serious consequences not only the for participants, but also for the women with whom they choose to form relationships. Whilst the testimony of Kamila quoted above describes the process retrospectively as a worthy investment, Tomasz, past participant of RT presents an alternative scenario of an instance in which *Odwaga*'s participant got married to a woman:

I was not the only one who was being encouraged to get married, I know one guy who unfortunately followed this advice and it ended badly, he got mentally ill, like actually ill, I mean he got divorced later and then was alone, I think. But I think that it must have been a lot of stress, because when you have gone through all that [therapy] and he still do not feel it, the marriage, but I think it was also a method for producing results... cause if he got married, then certainly he must be cured, right? (Tomasz, past RT participant, 2015)

Here again Tomasz's account points to the highly problematic ethics of the practice of RT, whereby people are persuaded to enter heterosexual marriages as the next logical step upon completion of the programme; it also highlights the way in which such result- rather than person-orientated approach can have lasting damaging effect on both the men who follow the advice and the women they marry.

Finally, based on the above demonstrated understanding of gender roles within RT, where women figure almost exclusively as supportive characters as either mothers or wives, it is unsurprising that the model of the family promoted is that of a patriarchal one, with the heterosexual couple and their strongly gendered division of labor at the centre. For some men the desire to have a



traditional family was in fact the motivating factor for joining or remaining in an RT group, as illustrated by the quotes below:

I always knew I wanted to have a wife and children, a family, to build something and in a way I saw the group as a way to get this... now I think it was naïve and obviously not going to happen, but back then it made sense. Get better, fall in love [with a woman] start a family and you know, live happily ever after [laughs] (Szymon, past RT participant, 2016).

In the beginning it was the lack of knowledge, I think... I thought it would all change... Or that my sexual orientation is still unformed...<sup>97</sup> that I might actually be bisexual... Later however, not necessarily [that was guiding me], I wanted to have a family, etc., so I was more interested in issues of a social nature, I could not imagine a life of loneliness, and this [homosexual] orientation is generally linked to that (Piotr, past RT participant, 2016).

Piotr's account echoes points I made earlier about the invisibility of the structural inequalities and homophobia, whereby homosexuality is first approached as a developmental phase and then linked explicitly to loneliness. Whilst, as mentioned above, Piotr is now married and has children, Szymon has given up on his dream of having a family and what is of importance here is how they both understand family in terms of the heterosexual, nuclear version thereof. If we combine that with RT's understanding of single-parent families – with its gendered aspect of female headed households as dysfunctional and potentially leading to homosexual tendencies, the narrative that emerges is one that constructs the heterosexual, patriarchal family as the *only* valid site for child rearing, discounting any other configurations.

Consequently and to sum up this section, the gender politics of RT are strongly biased towards the male subject, that, is supposedly free to shape his own destiny. Whilst RT mobilizes individualizing and self-responsibilizing narratives, these rest on an unquestionably gendered double standard. Colluding with the patriarchal order of Catholic Christianity, but also with the neoliberal understanding of subjectivity, the world of RT is a male-centered and male-serving one.

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<sup>97</sup> The word used here is '*wykrystalizowana*' which directly translated means 'uncrystallised'.

## 6.5 Role of experts

[A]fter my therapy for agoraphobia, related to neurosis, at some point I decided, that okay, here I had a symptom in the form of agoraphobia... so I thought that it is exactly the same with my [sexual] orientation [laughs]. So, simply, if I untangle some things, just like there, I will get over it, right? And this was the assumption for instance in the work with the therapist, in the group (Bartek, past RT participant, 2016).

As much as psychotherapeutic self-governance demands that we become experts in our own lives, in order to do so we need to access the knowledge that would enable us to first make sense of ourselves and then to learn the corrective techniques necessary for effective self-governance and re-direction. Thus, experts occupy a unique place in the economy of self-governance and the knowledge claims they make become instrumental in disseminating and legitimizing certain ways of being in the world and profoundly influence how we think about ourselves. Expert knowledge is thus never neutral; Rose writes:

It is in the space opened between the imposition of controls upon conduct by the public powers and the forms of life adopted by each individual that the vocabularies and techniques of the psycho-sciences operate. In the complex web they have traced out, *the truths of science and the powers of experts act as relays* that bring the values of authorities and the goals of businesses into the contact with the dreams and actions of us all (Rose, 1999a, p. 261).

At the same time, it is through positioning homosexuality as a disorder and mobilizing the repertoire of expert language and knowledge that the need for intervention, and effectively for RT, is produced. Pathologizing of homosexuality has a long history and a one that is tied intimately to the way modern science of human sexuality developed (Foucault, 1978). RT can be considered a continuation of that tradition. Thus, in Poland and elsewhere RT claims to be scientific based on research and relevant empirical evidence. However, dismissing it as plainly unscientific is problematic, as it would imply that objective science does indeed exist. Yet, as decades of feminist scholarship attest, knowledge production is never fully objective or politically neutral, but rather, it frequently reflects and reproduces ideologies, power relations, and inequalities in the society, and RT is in that sense a good example of how this plays out. As I have argued in Chapter 3, on a theoretical level, RT is best understood as a combination of insights from psychotherapeutics and religious

dogma, and it is in both the space of the confessional and the therapy room that it is 'practiced'. Thus the experts who partake in the process include both trained therapists and priests, who are either affiliated with RT groups, or are simply sympathetic to their projects. In addition, the groups have their own databases of experts that they recommend to participants. Consequently, there is professional help available to support the work of the group, as illustrated well by Kamil's account:

I had a very strong motivation towards change and indeed I did everything that was expected, everything that could be done for... I don't know, for a quick improvement. So it was mainly individual therapy – to find a therapist and a spiritual guide, a companion, a regular confessor, or, or a priest with whom one could talk – and I found two such persons within a month (Kamil, past RT participant 2015).

Thus, experts play an important role in facilitating RT and they are also the ones – I am thinking of the therapists in particular here – who directly profit from the practice, a point I revisit in the following chapters. Importantly, whilst for some participants of RT groups it turned out to be possible to find therapists outside of the circle of ones who cooperated with the group, and who also did not consider RT to be a valid response to issues related to self-acceptance that Christian gay men faced, none of the people interviewed for this study reported having met a priest who would question RT, providing yet more proof of the homophobic attitude of the many clergymen in Poland today.

At the same time, for some participants disillusionment with RT produces a sense of disappointment with the experts involved in the process and it applies to both the RT specialists and the religious personnel involved. A good example of the first case is Aleksander's statement below:

I think I resent the scientists the most... cause if you read these [RT] texts that we were given, but there was a priest there, some kind of doctor of sciences, of theology, or of the social doctrine of the Church; or a doctor of psychology, [names the founder of Pascha], well, okay, of psychology of business, so that's also a question how one can apply methods of business psychology here (Aleksander, past RT participant, 2015).

For Bartek, the experience of participating in an RT group produced a crisis of trust towards the other category of experts involved, the hierarchical Church representatives, and collective forms of religion in general:

It [the experience of RT group] heightened my critical approach to the church in general, and also to any form of participation based mainly on manipulating people emotionally. This is the main thing that keeps me away from any form of organized religion at the moment (Bartek, past RT participant, 2016).

Last but not least, there is also the element of epistemic statuses that experts have vs. non-experts, which may at times bring class differences into relief. This is illustrated well by the quote from my interview with Mateusz, who is the only working class past RT group participant interviewed for this study:

They [people in charge of RT groups] are very good at it; they are trained in all of this and devote a lot of time, and energy, work and education, to become good at it. And I guess they are... renowned specialists in their discipline, and I guess people listen to them... Cause they have a PhD... of some sort, and me, a simple person, what do I know, so [there is] a certain dissonance here (Mateusz, past RT participant, 2015).

I return to the questions of class in Chapter 7, what is however worth noting here is the uneven power relationship that Mateusz signals – between the educated professionals, specialists and ‘a simple person’ like him.

## **6.6 Telling the poor man he *can* become rich**

In this chapter I have investigated RT as a practice of responsabilization and individualization, a technology of the self. By examining how RT requires its participants to self-scrutinize and self-manage both individually and in a group setting, I demonstrate how its promise and methods reproduce neoliberal notions of selfhood by reiterating the ideal of the self-made, agentic and in-control subject. What cannot be denied is that RT participants are entrepreneurs of the self in a truly neo-liberal sense. It is therefore only in the logic of neoliberalism that we can make sense of the opening quote from Miłosz's testimony, which I believe is worth citing again here:

Do not treat homosexual tendencies as something that cannot be changed. Because it is the same as telling a poor person: 'Man, you were born poor and you will stay that way. There is no point to work, because you will never make it.' But it is possible to make it and become rich (Miłosz's testimony, *Pomoc 2002*, 2015).

Whilst Miłosz's testimony perfectly sums up the ways in which RT colludes with and reproduces the neoliberal narrative of selfhood, the complete inattention to structural inequalities it signals makes it sound both daring and very naïve.

Yet, as I also illustrate above, RT reproduces the logic of the neoliberal ordering of the self also in terms of how it is gendered and biased towards the male subject relegating women to secondary, subordinate roles as mothers and wives. Thus, the ability to engage in such entrepreneurial making and remaking of the self is in RT reserved for men. I argue that it is a site that reproduces gendered stereotypes that position men as in charge of their destiny and sexuality, chiming in with the critique of neoliberal ideas of the self as ultimately gendered. It is also on gender politics that RT colludes and is almost seamlessly incorporated into the locally prevalent patriarchal understanding of the role of women within the family and by extension also in the society at large, a traditional male-centered and male-serving order, of which the Church has been the ceaseless guardian in Poland.

Finally and as discussed in Chapter 2, practices of neoliberalism and their effects are contradictory in nature and thus they can have 'both homophilic and homophobic potentials', as noted by John Binnie (2014, p. 246). RT in Poland is certainly a manifestation of the latter form of potential, what I demonstrate in this chapter is how examining it opens up new avenues for scrutinizing how neoliberal ideas permeate and influence the ways in which sexuality and gender are experienced. Using RT as an example, I demonstrate how internalization of neoliberal notions of the self might be harmful and how it can also have negative long-term effects on the sense of wellbeing and self-acceptance of men who go through it. Last, but not least, the important role that experts play in facilitating RT suggests not only a level of professionalization, but also points to the material dimension of the phenomenon, whereby a service is provided at a price and a profit is made, a point I take up in the next chapters, where I also examine the classed dimension of the practice.

## Chapter 7: Classing And Locating Sexualities In Poland

### 7.1 Introduction

In this chapter the different sites of my investigation are brought together as I explore themes of class and geographical location in relation to both reparative therapy (RT) groups and LGBT activism, both Christian and mainstream. I also interrogate the subjective geographies of discrimination and emancipation and illustrate how these reproduce certain metrocentric, and classist assumptions. A short note on the methods specific to this chapter; whilst Chapters 5 and 6 were predominantly based on the data produced through the semi structured in-depth qualitative interviews this chapter draws on both the interviews and the data produced through the questionnaire (see Chapter 4 for detailed discussion of the topics covered in the questionnaire). This is particularly true for the discussions of class, but also for questions around location (e.g. issues of rural-urban migration).

The aim is to engage with both the lived experiences of class and location as well as with their subjectively constructed understandings. I begin by probing the ways in which both LGBT activists and members of WiT construct RT participants and the practice of RT, before examining whether RT can be considered to be a practice marked by class. Focusing on the material aspects of RT in Poland, I also investigate the differences between the three RT groups (*Odwaga, Pascha* and *Pomoc 2002*) in question. This is followed by a discussion of ways in which LGBT activism in Poland might be classed. I then move on to discuss questions of location and what I term, paraphrasing Puar (2006, p. 69), the ‘imaginative geographies’ of discrimination and emancipation that emerge from the narratives of my participants. Puar, uses the term to discuss the mapping of the geography of US homonormativities, for her its geography is imaginative because:

despite the unevenness, massively evidenced, of sexual and racial tolerance across varied spaces and topographies of identity in the US, it nonetheless exists as a core belief system about liberal mores defined within and through the boundaries of the US (Puar, 2006, 68).

The ‘imaginative’ that Puar discusses is also performative, inasmuch that ‘certain desired truths become lived as truths, as if they were truths, thus producing all sorts of material traces and evidences of these truths, despite what counter-evidence may exist’ (Puar, 2006, p. 68). Thus, to an extent, what is believed to be real is real in its consequences. For the purpose of my study the concept is useful for capturing how such imaginative geographies of discrimination and emancipation inform the politics of the Polish LGBT movement. I begin by teasing out the complex ways in which locations become marked as LGBT friendly or LGBT hostile territories. I then unpack the way in which such binary understandings of the Polish social reality are classed without ever being named as such. I then examine the ways in which this view is troubled by some of the participants' narratives that reveal different sets of dynamics at work.

Whilst, the chapter is divided into three sections of which each is meant to address one of the main themes: RT and class, LGBT movement and class, and location, the ways in which class and location relate to each other is also of importance, an issue that becomes evident when the imaginative geographies of discrimination are discussed. Thus, there is a spatial dimension to class, and geographical locations are often sites where class divisions are marked, reinforced and reproduced. The three parts of this chapter are meant to speak to each other, highlighting the complex intersections of sexuality, class and geographical location. It is through this intersectional reading that a richer and more nuanced picture of the politics of sexuality in contemporary Poland can emerge, challenging the biases that position certain spaces and classed subjectivities as inherently LGBT-friendly whilst constructing others as timelessly homo-, bi- and transphobic. The intersecting analytical work that this chapter aims to do, is based on making connections across themes (of sexuality, location, and class) that are rarely held up together for analysis, as I will demonstrate below, what this enables me to do is on one hand to challenge the common knowledge held by my participants, whilst on the other hand it opens up new avenues of inquiry previously unexplored by academic work on the Polish LGBT movement and politics of sexuality.

## 7.2. RT in Poland – Whom for? Classing RT

Considering the fact that all of the RT groups researched for this project have strong links to religion, it is not surprising that religiosity is perceived as the main common characteristic of people who join such groups. Thus, the questions of ‘whom is RT for?’ or ‘what kind of people were in your RT group?’ is almost always answered by evoking the religiosity of potential and actual participants as well as by referring to the religiosity/LGBT sexuality conflict I discuss in Chapter 5. This view is shared amongst the majority of participants in this study and across all categories (LGBT activists, WiT members, past participants of RT groups), as illustrated by examples below:

MM: Who are the potential clients of RT in Poland?

Robert: Typically it is a young girl, or a guy, or rather a young adult, usually raised... in a family that is... religious, [so] a person who when they discover their sexuality feels worse, somehow broken, in a sense *evil*, for that's how the [Catholic Church's] catechism formulates it... that it's an internal orientation towards evil (Robert, member of WiT, 2015; emphasis in original).

MM: Who is RT for?

Sylwia: [It's for people] who struggle to accept their sexual orientation... for Catholics, or in general religious people, where the [sexual] orientation is not accepted, I know that this is a big motivation for entering such groups and therapies (Sylwia, LGBT activist, 2015).

MM: How would you describe an average participant [of the group]?

Aleksander: They are very different people, really, I would not put them into one bag, what is worrying is that they generally come from traditional families, so the point of departure is this Christian motivation, religious one, simply (Aleksander, past participant of RT, 2015).

At the same time, in the narratives of LGBT activists and members of WiT, RT is often presented as a choice for people who 'do not know any better' to borrow a phrase used by one of the LGBT activists. The idea that choosing to join an RT group stems from a place of ignorance and/or misinformation is a common thread in the way LGBT activists as well as members of WiT approach the topic. Patrycja's answer to the question of what kind of people RT groups attract is a particularly good example of this:



People who are probably religious, but also people who don't have any knowledge about homosexuality, or rather, they have a knowledge base that is full of myths, cause it's not like they don't have any knowledge, rather in my opinion, they have a [knowledge] that is completely erroneous (Patrycja, LGBT activist, 2015).

Some of the LGBT activists interviewed frame RT participation in highly individualizing terms, either as an option for people who are weak, as in Adrian's response to the question 'Whom is RT for?': 'It is certainly for people who are psychologically weak' (Adrian, LGBT activist, 2015); or for people who somehow failed to properly explore the causes of their unhappiness, as illustrated by Sylwia's response to the same question:

It's for Catholics, or religious people... and predominantly... for people who have bad experiences and think that these bad experiences are exclusively a result of their [sexual] orientation, so they only see this as a cause of their failures in love, or in professional life... they don't seek other causes in themselves, I don't know, [in their] personality, or [in] that they make bad decisions, they just focus on the [sexual] orientation and see everything through this prism (Sylwia, LGBT activist, 2015).

Whilst Sylwia acknowledges the importance of religion as a factor, she then goes on to describe the internal state of a person who might seek to join an RT group, the way she frames it, it can be best described as one of false consciousness. At times, LGBT activists were also prone to position RT as a practice that would appeal to people from the underprivileged groups in society. An example of this is Kinga's answer to the question 'What kind of people might avail of RT?' She states:

[It is] for people who are internally conflicted, somehow lost [pauses] I don't know, but if a family is in a difficult situation, mom drinks, father is violent, or he is drinking too, or is constantly absent, or gone and there is seven kids... so the problem is elsewhere, but it is easier to blame it on sexual orientation (Kinga, LGBT activist, 2015).

What the quote above mobilizes is an image of a pathological family rife with abuse and addictions, characterized by high number of children and low parental investment.<sup>98</sup> Considering Kinga's own positionality as a middle class,

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<sup>98</sup> This image is a reoccurring theme in the ways class is talked about in Poland; most recently it surfaced in relation to the controversial, newly implemented programme of public financial support for families known as 500+, where 500 zlotys a month is paid for each second and next child in the family. Whilst part of the debate was also whether better off families should be given the same level of financial support as those with lower incomes, the debate often focused

highly educated, urban LGBT activist, this image is also classed, as well as classing, insomuch that in the Polish context the trope of large families with alcohol problems is mobilized almost exclusively in relation to the working class. Such framing positions the seeker of RT as someone with a lower class background, which in turn is conflated with pathology. Admittedly, Kinga's account is a particularly stark example of how RT becomes viewed as an option for the marginalized, yet overall the LGBT participants interviewed for this study had a rather negative view of people who would seek RT, despite the fact that many reported having limited knowledge of the phenomenon, or never having met anyone who would have participated in any of the RT groups under consideration.

Whilst WiT members were overall more focused on the external pressures and the religiosity/sexuality conflict in particular, than LGBT activists, they were also at times more prone to mark small town/rural locations as places where the target RT clientele is to be found. This is illustrated by Ola's response to the 'RT, whom for?' question:

For people who have internalized homophobia, who are from Catholic families... in Poland the level of homophobia is still very high. I can imagine a path of such a person, who is born in a small town, discovers his [homo]sexual drive, falls in love... but cannot see any other chance at building a happy life than heterosexual marriage (Ola, member of WiT, 2015).

A similar point was made by Robert, who in his response to the same question began by describing the conflict that a religious person experiences when discovering their homosexuality, but then went on to discuss the pressures a religious person faces of living in a small town that might make them seek RT, which for him are the same as the pressures that make people attend mass with their family, get married in a church, and conform to a certain set of rules, regardless of how religious they actually are, for as he put it 'whether people are actually more religious in small towns, I doubt that' (Robert, member of WiT, 2015). I return to the questions of locations below.

Moreover, the material dimension of RT was frequently ignored, indeed, it was only on one occasion that an alternative interpretation of the question

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on how in low income families the money will be used on alcohol, deepening the pathology implicitly associated with poverty and having many children (Podolski, 2016).

'RT, whom for?' was offered when Monika, a member of WiT, pointed to the financial aspects of the practice:

If it is something that you pay for and if it is somewhat expensive, cause it also takes a long time, then maybe it's for people who can afford such a treatment, cause I don't expect these institutions [RT groups] to be funded by the money we put into the baskets [during Catholic mass], cause then they [the groups] would officially say so (Monika, member of WiT, 2015).

Accordingly, Monika's response signals the largely overlooked fact that RT is costly, and thus it may be unavailable to some. This is of importance, as it points to the ways in which RT, not unlike other forms of therapy is a domain of people with sufficiently high levels of disposable income and I return to the point of the financial costs of participation in RT groups below. What is of relevance here is the often implicit classed and localized view of RT that emerges from my interviews with LGBT activists, which is, as I will demonstrate below inaccurate. Positioning RT as a domain of the lower classes and/or from small town/rural locations is reflective of certain classist assumptions more than it is of the reality of the practice.

Based on this study, despite the small size of the sample, I think that certain regularities can be observed in regards to the type of men that choose to join RT groups in Poland, even though the emerging 'profile' does not correspond with the ideas that LGBT activists and WiT members have about a typical client of RT. In total, I interviewed eight men who have gone through the programmes of RT groups as clients for this study. Out of these eight one was a past participant of *Odwaga*, one was a past participant of *Pomoc 2002*, two have been in both *Pomoc 2002* and *Pascha* (in both cases in that chronological order), one was in *Odwaga* and then *Pascha*, and the remaining three were past participants of *Pascha* only. What is interesting is that only one of these participants (the one participant who used to be in *Pomoc 2002*) is working class, based on his occupational and family background. Five of past RT participants interviewed for this study could be classified as middle class with working class background<sup>99</sup>, so examples of upward social mobility, the remaining two could be classified as middle class. One reported having an income of above 5000 zlotys per month (ca. £1000); four had an income of

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<sup>99</sup> From working class families, where neither of parents attended college.

between 2500-3500 zlotys per month; three reported having a monthly income of between 1500-2500 zlotys.<sup>100</sup> All were in full-time employment at the time of their participation in this study. Five out of eight owned a property. None of the eight participants came from a family that they would describe as wealthy or rather wealthy; one described the financial situation of his family at the time when he was growing up as 'rather poor'; the remaining seven opted for 'average'.

Based on the above data and the accounts of the past participants of *Pascha* and *Odwaga* interviewed for this project, in particular their descriptions of their fellow group members, one could say that there are certain shared characteristics, besides religiosity, that RT groups' participants have. It appears that participation in RT groups in Poland is a practice that is in fact classed and the responses of past RT participants below point to the particulars of the demographic make-up of Polish RT groups:

MM: Could you tell me something about the people who were in the group at the same time as you? What kind of people were they?

Dawid: The majority of them were older, I think, now they would be around 40 years old, but there were also younger people...The main motif was [that] they were deeply religious people, very religious... mostly people who were closed to start with, but then opened up a bit more during these meetings, right? They led different lifestyles, had different professions, so the scope was big here, *from students to lawyers* (Dawid, past RT participant, 2015; emphasis added).

MM: If you were to tell me about the people in the group, what kind of people were they?

Patryk: Hmmm, actually people similar to me... with... religious upbringing... who were trying to reconcile who they are... and religiosity, and the demands that the church makes on them... They wanted... to do something about it, to understand, I don't know, to sort [themselves] out... But often they were very positive people, spontaneous, creative, with heads full of ideas, and *people also at a certain level*,<sup>101</sup> right? In fact, I can say that probably a majority, an overwhelming majority of Pascha's so called clients were either students, or people who finished studying, so people with university education. Rarely someone with secondary school education would come... But I did not meet anyone in Pascha who would... have vocational education (Patryk, past RT participant 2015; emphasis added).

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<sup>100</sup> In the first quarter of 2016, average monthly gross wages and salaries in Poland amounted to ca 4000 zł (GUS, 2016). However, in 2015 two thirds of Poles earned less than the average; in the same year the median pay was reported to be around 80% of the average one (Maciejewicz, 2015).

<sup>101</sup> The exact phrase used by the participant is '*ludzie na poziomie*', this phrase is often used in Polish when talking about people with good socio-economic standing and cultural capital, so people who are also perceived as respectable and rational.

Faced with the same question another past RT participant stated:

It was an interesting group of people. I guess what they had in common was that they wanted to change. All very smart people, really, highly cultured<sup>102</sup>, very often educated, clued-in<sup>103</sup>, with ambitions... (Szymon, past RT participant, 2016).

These responses are significant inasmuch that they signal that RT groups – and certainly *Pascha* to which all three of the above quoted interviewees belonged to in the past<sup>104</sup> – is an option that attracts people with high level of cultural as well as sufficient economic capital. It is thus a practice that has a class dimension, even though class is not directly named as a factor or a marker of difference (as is often the case in Poland, if we return to my discussion in the Introduction). Instead, class is displaced onto discourses of educational background of the participants, as in the case of Patryk. Importantly, the trope of vocational education that is mobilized here is arguably one of the strongest markers of being working class in Poland and I return to it later on in this chapter. Hence, *Pascha* is constituted as a site for '*people at a certain level*', a phrase that in Polish hints at high levels of cultural capital of the participants. Similarly, the scope of professions that Dawid mentions suggests a particular combination of class bias – the range is not from a bus driver to lawyer, for example, but from a student, so someone already in higher education to lawyer, a profession perceived as amongst the most prestigious ones. So *Pascha* is for people who are not working class, where class is defined on the basis of one's education/profession. Szymon's answer again references education and culture, whilst also adding ambition into the mix, a characteristic that is often presented as specific of the middle classes in a disciplining and responsabilizing discourse that positions working and lower class people as having little or no ambition; here again the tropes of neoliberal individualization that I discuss in Chapter 6 are echoed.

Additionally, some past participants of RT groups use their particular experience within the group to draw general conclusions about LGBT people as

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<sup>102</sup> 'o wysokim poziomie kultury osobistej'

<sup>103</sup> 'z pojęciem'

<sup>104</sup> Szymon was also in *Odwaga* for a limited period of time (2 months).

more educated and implicitly also middle class, as illustrated by Patryk's account below:

[I]n my experience as a homosexual, the majority of people, whom I know or have met, they are university educated... I don't really know [gay] people with vocational education, but I know they exist. Somewhere I came across some, I have met some, but [it happens] very rarely. *I think this is a specificity of this milieu... that these are often people who... invest in themselves* (Patryk, past RT participant 2016; emphasis added).

Here the trope of self-investment is employed alongside that of educational achievement, both are positioned as somehow intrinsically linked to being gay. Such generalizations are of importance, as they make invisible the experiences of working class LGBT people, relegating them to the margins, positioning them as rare and exceptional cases. This in turn colludes with a certain understanding of homophobia as classed, a domain of the working and lower classes, a point that I return to below.

As discussed in Chapter 2, therapy and by extension therapeutic self-governance have been theorised as the domains of the middle class, and RT in Poland appears to reflect a similar dynamic inasmuch as it is not a domain of the working class. The practice appeals to a group of people who are either middle class or are examples of upward social mobility and could be categorized as middle class with working class background. This is telling in particular in the view of RT being considered (by the LGBT activists as well as by WiT members) a choice of the uneducated and/or misinformed. As argued in Chapter 6, RT can be considered a technique of the self that colludes with neoliberal understandings of personhood. Thus and importantly, just as many other forms of therapeutic practices, RT requires a certain level of cultural and economic capital that enables one to a) psychologize one's experiences and articulate them in ways that makes it possible to seek 'treatment' aimed at readjustment and b) use one's disposable income to pursue paid group and/or individual therapy, which as will be discussed next is not an option available to all.

### 7.2.1. Do you get what you pay for?

It was not cheap, the therapy, around 100 zlotys, first every week, then every second week, then there were the retreats, the travel expenses, but then again you cannot expect it to be free either, right? I guess it's not something that everyone can pay for, that's for sure... It would have been better if it actually worked [laughs], [it would have been] better value for money (Szymon, past participant of RT, 2016).

Notwithstanding the similarities in terms of their theoretical and ideological basis, on a practical level the three RT groups under scrutiny here are very different types of organizations. Consequently, my findings suggest that the practice of RT in Poland is not a monolithic phenomenon.<sup>105</sup> To begin, the three groups, vary in terms of their institutionalization: *Odwaga* is arguably the most established, with headquarters in Lublin and close ties to the Church. *Pascha* despite having some form of central management structure is very much a locally driven initiative, whilst *Pomoc 2002* is a group centered around one man, who runs and controls it from his flat in Radom, a medium sized city in east-central Poland (see map of Poland in Appendix 6). Correspondingly, the level and kind of engagement that participants have with the groups also varies. Whilst *Odwaga* has a structured programme of weekend workshops that spans over a year in support and therapeutic groups, *Pascha* is more of a self-help group focused around regular meetings and locally-organized activities (most often team sports), whereby one of the participants functions as a leader; there is also no limit to how long participants can stay in the group.<sup>106</sup> Finally, in *Pomoc 2002*, participants attend weekend workshops where they stay over in the leader's flat and take part in talking group therapy as well as one-on-one

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<sup>105</sup> This view is further complicated when we consider the non-group therapeutic efforts at sexual re-orientation that take place behind the closed doors of individual psychotherapists' offices. In the course of this study I was only able to interview one professional who offers RT to individual clients; their practice was rooted in the theories and work of Joseph Nicolosi. Nevertheless, few of my participants spoke of the issue and a good example of this is Sebastian's account:

I would like to bring your attention to the fact that besides the [RT] groups there are individuals, I mean of all sorts and hues, better or worse, or self-proclaimed psychotherapists, psychologists, priests, and also confessors, who have no experience in psychology, but they help, get involved – and we know this based on who the members of WiT are – who individually, without any group or institutional support get involved in all sorts of therapeutic efforts, therapeutic in inverted commas... or methods of... changing, psycho-sexual orientation [of LGBT people] (Sebastian, member of WiT, 2015).

<sup>106</sup> It is up to participants themselves to decide when they are ready to leave. This results in a very variable length of involvement, from six months up to six years.

sessions with the leader. In addition, *Pascha* runs yearly retreats that all members from all local groups are expected to attend; similarly *Pomoc 2002* runs occasional retreats.<sup>107</sup> It is *Pascha* that is the biggest of the three, with several local groups across the country, even though the exact number of local groups is not stable, as illustrated by Patryk's response below to the question about their number:

That varied, but there was a group in Warsaw... there was one in Kraków, there was a Silesian one, based around Katowice, there was also a group in Wrocław... which at time was coming together with the Silesian one, and there was the Pomeranian one, based around the Trzcianka.<sup>108</sup> Somewhere some mini groups were emerging, so to say, I think in Toruń, possibly in Szczecin there was something going on, but I cannot recall it exactly. Let's say that four or five local groups were operating (Patryk, past RT participant, 2015).

Additionally, *Odwaga* appears to be the most expensive option from the three groups and even though I was unable to find out how much it costs to take part in its programme now, it used to cost around 150 zlotys (ca. £30) per weekend, of which 100 zlotys was for the therapy and 50 zlotys to cover the costs of accommodation and food (Tomasz, past RT participant, 2015).

At the same time, even though the costs of membership in *Pascha* are said to be nominal (one past participant reported that a monthly fee of 10 zlotys, ca. £2, was collected to cover the operational costs of the group) – there is a recommendation/rule that every participant takes part in individual therapy, which in turn brings the overall cost of participation up significantly. Daniel describes it particularly well when he recounts:

So, the retreats we had to pay for, they were not terribly expensive, but still... The costs of therapy... well here there was no subsidy of any sort, so everyone had to manage for themselves... It was 100 zlotys [per session]. Depending on how frequently [one went], whether once a week... or fortnightly, that differed, depending on people's ability [to pay]. I remember setting it up in a way that would allow me to pay it, and not so that I go every week, cause if you could not afford it then it couldn't be done [to go weekly] (Daniel, past participant of RT group, 2016).

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<sup>107</sup> The most recent one of these retreats documented on the group's website took place in August 2016 and included a group of women characterised as 'friends of the group' (*Pomoc2002*, 2016).

<sup>108</sup> Referring to three coastal cities in the north of Poland: Gdansk, Gdynia and Sopot.



Considering that in Poland an hour of individual psychotherapy costs between 80 and 150 zlotys (ca. £20-£30), whereby urban centres are more expensive than smaller cities (Charaktery, 2016), it is evident that not everyone can shoulder the financial burden of participation.<sup>109</sup> For Dawid, who spent a relatively short time in *Pascha* (6 months), it was the cost of therapy that eventually became an obstacle to participation:

Dawid: It was recommended [to go to therapy] and at some stage I did go, but for financial reasons unfortunately I had to leave it... But it was very much recommended... beside the work done in the group, to do something with it... it was necessary, the [individual] therapy.

MM: And you found that too costly?

Dawid: Exactly, too costly (Dawid, past participant of RT, 2015).

What the above quotes illustrate is that *Odwaga's* and *Pascha's* programmes constitute options that are not open to all, as people lacking the necessary financial resources are excluded. This also points back to the erroneous perception of RT that some of LGBT activists and WiT members have, as a practice for the lower classes.

Conversely, the situation looks differently in *Pomoc 2002*, which charges an entry fee of 250 zlotys but there is no further cost for the participation per se. In addition, past participants have reported that within the group one was encouraged to become a representative for Amway (a company that deploys direct selling model, selling beauty, home and health products) as a way of supplementing one's income. At the same time, as mentioned in Chapter 6, some of the financial practices of *Pomoc 2002* can best be described as obscure, in particular the system of penalties for masturbation. Nevertheless, *Pomoc 2002* is overall the cheapest option from the three groups in question, whilst the costs of participation in the other two groups might be prohibitive, as illustrated by the following exchange with Mateusz, the only working class past RT participant in my study:

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<sup>109</sup> 400 zlotys a month for therapy is not a small expenditure in the Polish context; in the first quarter of 2016; to reiterate, average monthly gross wages and salaries in Poland amounted to ca 4000 zl (GUS, 2016). However, in 2015 two thirds of Poles earned less than the average; in the same year the median pay was reported to be around 80% of the average one (Maciejewicz, 2015).

Mateusz: During a confession I was recommended to join *Odwaga*, but I came across *Pomoc 2002*, the costs of *Odwaga* were horrendous to me at the time.

MM: And what were the costs then?

Mateusz: Well, it was some kind of crazy money for me, I was working on a zero hour contract, it was tough going, so to say that I was to pay 400 zlotys, 500 zlotys for something... it was surreal for me... [also] to travel to Lublin.

MM: And how was it in *Pomoc 2002*? Did you have to pay there?

Mateusz: No (Mateusz, past participant of RT, 2015).

The fact that *Pomoc 2002* is the least expensive and thus arguably the most accessible option is of significance, as based on my research it also appears to be the most controversial of the groups in question. This is not to say that the remaining two are unproblematic, however, the methods deployed by the self-styled leader of *Pomoc 2002* are particularly questionable. Past participants of *Pomoc 2002* have talked about being asked to undress in front of the leader as well as being propositioned to share a bed together with him, both activities were supposedly aimed at 'getting used to' male physicality in a non-sexual context. One of the past participants described the behaviour of the leader as 'disgustingly sleazy towards the young men' in the group. The leader has also been reported to pressure participants to limit or cut contacts with their families. Even though the number of past participants of *Pomoc 2002* interviewed for this study is small and none of them remained in the group for a significant amount of time, their accounts suggest that *Pomoc 2002* might be a site of abuse.<sup>110</sup> This becomes of importance when paired with accounts of the characteristics of people who took part in *Pomoc 2002*. For instance Rafał describes the people who were in the group at the same time as him in the following manner:

The participants of these meetings were people very prone to manipulation, and really in a bad emotional state... what is also interesting, besides the sexual orientation, each of them had their own life problems, serious ones. I mean it was basically a group of troubled people, where the sexual orientation was one among many problems, so some were addicted to alcohol; some had problems with [addiction to] masturbation... this kind of issues (Rafał, past participant of RT group, 2015)

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<sup>110</sup> I interviewed 4 men in total who have had contact with *Pomoc 2002*; three were actual 'clients' and one was involved in a journalist provocation against the group; from the three actual participants one was only ever in *Pomoc 2002*, and two were first in *Pomoc 2002* and then in *Pascha*.

Szymon who took part in one meeting in *Pomoc 2002* before joining *Pascha* recalls the feelings of unease with which he left the group:

When I left, I thought of these guys and kind of felt sorry for them. They were lost, but also fully convinced that [the leader] is the answer to their problems, whatever these problems were, homosexuality, addiction, and depression... For me the place was just too much, more like a sect than a support group (Szymon, past participant of RT, 2016).

Finally, the very emergence of *Pascha* is reported to be a result of controversial practices of *Pomoc 2002*, as the former is an offshoot of the latter. In Aleksander's description of the process the word 'sect' is used again:

So, *Pomoc* [2002] broke down during a retreat. It was that someone noticed certain dangerous practices of [the leader] and it was proposed that a psychologist should come. And through her simple intervention the group split and from that split *Pascha* emerged. It was in a way a transition - I'll be honest about it - from a sect into a group with some sect-like elements (Aleksander, past participant of RT group, 2015).

Considering the lack of transparency in regards to methods, costs and regulations (which is a characteristic of all the three groups under consideration here) it is evident that practices of RT groups in Poland can be sites of potential exploitation and manipulation. Alarming, it also appears that the scope for exploitation and potential harm done is the greatest for people who might also lack financial and other resources and choose to join *Pomoc 2002*. At the same time many aspects of RT participants' stories were not explored through this study and more research is needed to understand their motivations to enter into and then continue RT. Whilst I discuss the long term damage that RT causes in Chapter 6, what is important to point out here is that RT groups are also sites of commercial activity, where profit is made and I return to how this is significant to our understanding of politics of sexuality in Poland, and elsewhere, in relation to neoliberalization in Chapter 8. What I want to discuss next is the ways in which class comes to also figure in the Polish LGBT movement.

### 7.3 The LGBT movement in Poland - who and for whom?

During the interviews, I asked the participants of this study to describe an average member of their LGBT organization or their group (in case of WiT members).<sup>111</sup> The aim of this question was to probe the extent to which class but also other axes of difference are a factor in LGBT organizing in Poland. I then compared responses of my participants to the answers they provided when filling out the pre-interview questionnaire. Combined, the findings of my study suggests that Polish LGBT activists as well as members of WiT constitute a group of highly educated and resourceful people, effectively making the mainstream as well as Christian LGBT organizing in Poland the domain of the middle classes. At the same time, this point was very rarely acknowledged in the actual interviews. In fact, in particular when it comes to the members of WiT, often my participants insisted that their group is for 'all sorts of people' or even that the group is representative of the society at large. This point is particularly well demonstrated by my exchange with Sebastian below:

Sebastian: [T]he social structure [of WiT] is very complex... from a professor to a tram driver... there is also a group of academics...

MM: I see. You mentioned that there is a journalist, scientists, so I am wondering whether this tram driver might actually be somehow exceptional and whether generally there are mainly college-educated people in the group?

Sebastian: I would say that it [WiT]... is a good example of a cross section of the population, a sample that corresponds to it more less (Sebastian, member of WiT, 2015).

In fact, only twice an opposing view was presented that would suggest the dynamics of WiT's social structure were less diverse. These are worth quoting at length as they offer a more nuanced picture of the demographics of the group. The question posed to Michał was 'do you think that the existing LGBT organizations represent the interests of all LGBT people?' he responded:

I think that [LGBT organizations in Poland] represent the interests of people who are out, from the proverbial Warsaw, better off, better educated. I think that Lambda Warsaw is very open to people who are actually worse off and less educated, but I think it is also characteristic of WiT, that we are to a greater degree open, however, this problem also exists. There are some accusations that we are orientated towards Warsaw, towards activism... I don't know.

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<sup>111</sup> This question was not asked during the focus group interview conducted with members of WiT.

MM: Where do these accusations come from?

Michał: For example... from the Silesian group, which has a more of a social profile... There are more people there who are unemployed, worse off financially...<sup>112</sup> And few days ago this accusation was made by one of the activists there that more and more we are becoming an academic ministry,<sup>113</sup> that [we are] only for the intelligentsia, for people who are financially privileged, and yes, educated, etc., etc. And it's very interesting; cause indeed, this kind of evolution can be observed [in WiT] (Michał, member of WiT 2015).

In the quote above Michał begins by pointing to the classed and metrocentric character of Polish LGBT organizing, but also recognizes the somehow exceptional role Lambda Warsaw plays in helping people who are less privileged. Whilst Michał acknowledges the internal critique of WiT as an elitist organization, he does not investigate it further; he also does not seem particularly concerned with the development of WiT in the direction he describes. Yet the issue of a very particular profile of WiT membership resurfaced in another member's account in a much more pronounced way:

In general our group [WiT] is over-intellectualized... There is an overrepresentation of people who are doing PhDs, or already have a PhD, and if they don't then they have read loads... I don't necessarily like this, but, well, it's hard... because I also belong to this group of people who have this and not other kind of educational background, this and not other kind of interests, etc., so in a way I am part of it. I'll be honest I think that in general the character of WiT is like that, perhaps apart from the Silesian group (Emilia, member of WiT, 2015).

The quote suggests that WiT is a group that unites people with higher than average cultural capital and ones who are highly educated. Here again the Silesian group is mentioned as an exception to the rule. Emilia's account is unusual as it is the only instance when a participant of my study *explicitly* names class as a factor, even if it is done with high level of unease and uncertainty towards its relevance as a category to describe the Polish social context. In that sense, Emilia's narrative reflects some of the anxieties around thinking through class in Poland, which I argue extends beyond the immediate context of WiT and LGBT organizing in general. She states:

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<sup>112</sup> For this project only one person from the Silesian group was interviewed, thus I had no opportunity to validate this claim beyond the opinion of that single participant, who did in fact insist that WiT in Silesia is for everyone.

<sup>113</sup> Academic ministries are forms of church organized activities aimed specifically at university students, led by a designated priest.

[The Silesian group] is different... in a way that... there are people in it who represent different professions, but it's not even that... they are in general more pro-social... However, I am not sure how to say this, I think that they have a different background... it might be the difference of origins, the reality that they live in. Like their reality is a bit different from ours... For example there are many people there, who did not have the opportunity to go to college, or they had to interrupt their studies, or... their whole social context was different, or they were simply interested in different things, right? For example they had different values that they wanted to start to work early, or the circumstances forced them to do so... my perspective it's not the same as theirs, so to say. And even when I speak about them, so in a way, in a way I am also a minority, but in a different way than they are... I would say, I think it is related to class differences, but it's hard to speak of class differences in Poland.

MM: Why do you think so?

Emilia: Because I think that Poland is not a country where class differences are as strong as they are in the UK for instance, cause in the UK it is very clear, and it is not clear in Poland... We live in a world where very educated people sometimes work as cashiers and very uneducated people sometimes run great businesses, so in a way there is a high level of fluidity here (Emilia, member of WiT, 2015).

Emilia's account links back to the idea that being gay is not limited to educated/middle class, with the Silesian WiT group used as an example of such different way of 'being WiT.' On one hand, what is significant here is that in Emilia's narrative class comes to figure explicitly, even if uncomfortably, as an important axis of difference, which influences the way WiT operates. On the other hand, class is dismissed as an analytical category; it is positioned as irrelevant to the Polish social reality, which in turn is seen as characterized by social mobility, unlike that of the UK. Notably, Emilia speaks of social mobility that works both upwards and downwards, pointing to the often-precarious situation of the Polish middle class. Nevertheless, both Michał's and Emilia's accounts are unusual in highlighting that WiT might in fact, despite its efforts to be egalitarian, be an organization for a very specific group of people.

At the same time, mainstream LGBT activists were overall more likely than members of WiT to acknowledge the classed character of their organizations, even though they never actually used the term class; still, there was an understanding of LGBT activism as a domain of people from privileged backgrounds that could 'afford', both figuratively and literally, to engage in voluntary work. Describing an average member of his organization Adrian states:

Ok, so it is a person who is privileged, economically privileged, because as a rule people who work with us are people who volunteered with us before. In order to do voluntary work one needs time, to do unpaid work and that excludes people whose parents could not afford to finance their studies in Warsaw [and thus people who need to work to support themselves through the course of their studies] (Adrian, LGBT activist, 2015)

Adrian is explicit about the way in which unpaid labor of volunteering is a step necessary for being considered for paid positions within his organization. In that sense an exclusionary mechanism is in place where to be hired one needs to volunteer first and in order to volunteer one needs to have the resources necessary to allow one to work for free. Thus arguably not only volunteering, but by extension also work in an LGBT organization becomes a form of luxury, reserved for people who have the necessary means to engage in it, so the financial and by extension time resources required. Similar ideas around privilege surfaced in several accounts of LGBT activists; another example is Ula's answer to a question prompted by a participant's account of the range of highly educated 'experts' that were part of the organization she is active in:

MM: Is your organization in anyway elitist?

Ola: Elitist? I would not think about it in that way, I'd rather think of it as privilege, you know, people who live in a big city, who have access to - that's the way their lives developed - higher education, that they have this kind of economic situation, that leaves them some spare time for activism, [time] and energy... I think we are privileged (Ula, LGBT activist, 2015).

In the quote above Ula, just like Adrian, points out that volunteering is a form of activity that is available to those whose socio-economic status allows them to engage in what is effectively free labor. However, in Ula's account this ability to contribute to the work of voluntary organization and the resources that facilitate such engagement are decoupled from the structural inequalities that drive them, as she narrates these as the way people's 'lives developed'. Nevertheless, overall, LGBT activists interviewed for this study were self-reflective and aware of the privileged socio-economic characteristics of the group of people involved in LGBT activism in Poland in general. The data collected via the questionnaires supports this point and I now briefly discuss some of its compiled results.

To recap, for this project nine LGBT activists (of which two were also active in WiT) and fifteen members of WiT were interviewed. From the total number of participants only one person (member of WiT) did not have a university degree and taking into account their profession and family background could be classified as working class. In total six participants had PhDs. Two of the LGBT activists came from working class families where neither parent attended university; one came from a family where one parent attended university. In the case of the remaining six both parents had attended university and the families could be classified as either middle class, or intelligentsia. Five reported that their family was either wealthy or rather wealthy, three said they were from families whose financial situation was average, whilst one described her family as poor. In addition, three of the LGBT activists interviewed reported having a monthly income of over 5000 zlotys, one reported to be earning between 3500-5000 zlotys per month, two marked the 2500-3500 zlotys per month as an answer, two had a monthly income of 1500-2500 zlotys, whilst one reported having an income of below 1500 zlotys.<sup>114</sup> All were living in big cities, two reported having migrated from a small city and a village respectively.

The data produced for members of WiT differed slightly. For instance there were more examples of upward social mobility; more than half (8) of the WiT members interviewed reported coming from working class families, where neither parent attended college, whilst one person was from a family where one parent had a university degree. The remaining six participants came from families that could be said to belong to the middle class. WiT was also characterized by a higher rate of rural/small city to urban migration (six out of 15 participants) and a lower proportion of people who reported that their family was rather wealthy (4) – no WiT member chose to describe the situation of their family as 'wealthy', the majority reported that their families' financial situation was average (9), the two remaining participants chose 'rather poor' and 'poor' respectively. Three of interviewed WiT members reported having monthly income of over 5000 zlotys per month, four had monthly income between 2300 and 3500 zlotys, five earned between 1500 and 2500 zlotys a month, one

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<sup>114</sup> This answer was qualified as 'right now', suggesting that having such low income was not a regular state of affairs for this participant.



reported income below 1500 zlotys per month, whilst two WiT participants left the question about their income unanswered.

What the above points to is that overall LGBT activists as well as WiT members constitute a group of highly educated, relatively well off and middle class people. Whilst a future larger quantitative study would be useful in capturing the specifics of this status quo, the small scale findings of my study are still significant as they point to an almost entirely overlooked classed dimension of the Polish LGBT movement. This in turn is of relevance for the types of work that LGBT activism, both Christian and mainstream, does in Poland, the kind of activities and campaigns that are instigated and the type of audiences these aim to engage. It is also highly consequential for the politics of representation.<sup>115</sup> As decades of feminist scholarship teach us, representation is always a sensitive issue that becomes particularly sticky when addressed intersectionally. The absence of working class voices within the Polish LGBT movement poses questions of who is talking for whom and what is obscured in result.

It is also important to reiterate that in a climate of hostility from the Church, and lack of support from the state, the work of LGBT organizations in Poland takes place in a difficult socio-political context that further complicates the issue of representation, arguably narrowing down the scope for action. This last point is well conveyed in Przemek's response below:

MM: Do you think that the existing LGBT organizations in Poland represent interests of all LGBT people?

Przemek: I think that no organization represents the interests of all LGBT people; it represents its members... we are working for LGBT people, but we don't do it in a way that we are the representatives of all LGBT people, cause this is simply impossible. We represent ourselves, our knowledge and our experiences, and based on that we engage in activities, that in our opinion will help certain group of people (Przemek, LGBT activist, 2015).

At the same time, some LGBT activists were more outspoken about the difficulties of representing others. When faced with the same question, Sylwia responded:

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<sup>115</sup> In Chapter 5 I have already discussed the ways in which WiT members view the mainstream, LGBT organizing as not representative of their interests and how they thus feel excluded and marginalised in the movement.

I think that... a very big part, well, I don't know if a *very big* part, but a big part of LGBT people wants to stay closeted and that they do not like any of these activities that would show that homosexual, bisexual and trans people exist in the society. So this coming out, and fighting, parading, it is considered unnecessary...people are very anxious and reactive, in my opinion, they want to survive without changing anything around themselves... These people would prefer to sit tight, so they are not really represented by LGBT organizations. However, the part, that wants to change things, and wants to live with dignity in Poland, they are [represented] (Sylwia, LGBT activist, 2015; emphasis in original).

In the quote above Sylwia signals a level of frustration with those LGBT people who in her opinion rather than choosing to support the fight undermine it by not joining in and by distancing themselves from the work that LGBT organizations do. Whilst she acknowledges the anxieties of those who by remaining inactive, in her view, choose to support the status quo, she does not consider how their different positionalities might make the alternative, so coming out, getting involved, working towards change too costly. Instead, Sylwia constructs visibility and outness as conditions of dignified life, this bears resemblance to what Gray has called the 'compulsory visibility', which she in turn calls the dominating feature of LGBT representation and life today (Gray, 2009, p. 142). Such framing of LGBT lives is again consequential for whose interests LGBT organizations serve and what causes they prioritize in an environment where resources are scarce.

Considering the socio-economic make up of the Polish LGBT organizations, and the way in which these depend on voluntary work for their survival, and operations – a structural aspect I return to in the next chapter – one can say that there is a strong class dimension to the Polish LGBT movement overall. The overwhelming absence of working class people from LGBT activism suggests that their needs and interests remain largely invisible and unarticulated. It is not to say that these interests and needs are always necessarily different from those of middle class LGBT people, but it would also be wrong to assume they always collide with them. Thus, not including working class voices in their organizations and not actively seeking to investigate the needs of working class Polish LGBT people, Polish LGBT organizations remain the domain of the economically privileged and the elites. On a representational level this perpetuates the image that surfaced in some of the quotes above, of

LGBT people as affluent, educated and urban, and it is the last aspect I turn my attention to next.

#### **7.4 Locating discrimination, locating emancipation**

It happened that someone emailed me and said that they had walked 20 km to a village, to be even able to send me that email message; it was the only mail I got [from this person]. It was very dramatic, I remember, but these situations happen, when I don't know what to do. There are these places where even in the nearest big city, for example if the nearest big city is Białystok,<sup>116</sup> I cannot recommend anyone [any therapist] (Kinga, LGBT activist, 2015).

As discussed in Chapter 2, a range of scholars point out the links that exist between that what is urban and the process of LGBT identity formation (Gray, 2009; Halberstam, 2005; Weston, 1995). This study offers an insight into how these issues – of location and sexuality – are negotiated in contemporary Poland, addressing an existing research gap in the literature on the Polish LGBT movement as well as on the grassroots politics of sexuality in general.<sup>117</sup> Based on the responses to the questionnaire, all LGBT activists interviewed for this study were living in big cities and two reported having migrated from a small city and a village to very big cities. For WiT members five out fifteen participants migrated from a village to a big or very big city and one participant migrated from a village to a small city. Four out of eight past RT participants reported having migrated from village/small city to big or very big city. Thus, in total, ten of my participants came from rural or small town locations and many shared the experience of having migrated to a bigger place. This in turn, is of interest for several reasons; on the one hand recognizing that many LGBT activists (both members of WiT, but also, to an extent mainstream) come from non-urban settings adds a different dimension to our understanding of LGBT organizing in Poland as an exclusively urban phenomenon. Without negating the fact that in Poland LGBT organizations operate only in big and very big cities – a fact that WiT is partially changing with its local groups in places such

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<sup>116</sup> Białystok is a city in eastern Poland, close to the border with Belarus. It has a population of ca. 300,000.

<sup>117</sup> To date there is only one Polish comprehensive publication on the issue (see Fundacja Przestrzeń Kobiet, 2015).

as for example Rzeszow<sup>118</sup> – it must be acknowledged that the people who are engaged in their work, or partake in their activities (as is the case of WiT members) often come from different, non-urban settings. On the other hand what is brought into relief is the fact that even though a significant number of people have come from rural or small town backgrounds and now contribute to the work of the Polish LGBT movement, this does not translate into a development of any initiatives that would engage people in rural or small town locations. Thus, somehow paradoxically, small town/rural Poland does not figure as a place of interest for the Polish LGBT movement, beyond being positioned as a space to be left behind. My participants generally overlooked this fact and only one LGBT activist interviewed spoke of the issue in relation to the work her organization does:

You know, I always think about it, how in Poland we have some kind of metrocentrism... and I think how in fact a lot of Poland is small towns and villages and that majority of people live in small towns and villages.<sup>119</sup> And I am always thinking about that, are we [as an LGBT organization] using the right language, doing the right things... using the right tools? Maybe the social change is not here, that one organizes a debate in *Krytyka Polityczna*<sup>120</sup> (Patrycja, LGBT activist, 2015).

In the quote above a tension is signaled that arises from the (potential) dissonance of the work done by LGBT organizations and the social and geographical reality of Poland. Patrycja's account once again points to the ways in which the work that the Polish LGBT movement does is done by certain people and arguably also *for* certain people, and the small town and rural communities are not its target audience. Moreover, the way in which rural/small town to urban migration feeds LGBT organizing is largely unacknowledged, obscuring the way in which the two spaces are interconnected and interdependent. An exception to that was Przemek's account:

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<sup>118</sup> A city in south-eastern Poland with a population of 187,000.

<sup>119</sup> The degree of urbanization in Poland is lower than both in Western and most of Central and Eastern European countries and is at 61,3% (for comparison it is 89,9% in the UK) (UN, 2007, p. 71).

<sup>120</sup> *Krytyka Polityczna*, Political Critique is a left-liberal network of institutions and activists established in 2002 consisting of a quarterly magazine, a publishing house, cultural centres and activist clubs in several Polish cities, and a research centre based in Warsaw.

A lot of people from smaller places migrate to big cities, mainly the ones who have the courage, those who are able to change their place of living. This courage is also connected to the fact that they are brave enough to then start an [LGBT] organization, or to join one. So they join organizations in bigger cities, what results in this kind of snowballing effect, that people from small places who look for help receive it in big cities, so they move there (Przemek, LGBT activist, 2015).

In the quote above Przemek comments on the ways in which small town/rural migration impacts upon LGBT organizing. At the same time, the way he speaks about it, so in terms of personal attributes such as courage of those who choose to migrate, positions the ones who choose to stay as somehow cowardly or conformist. Such view is as universalizing as it is discriminatory. Moreover, by overemphasizing the individual factors and qualities of urban migrants this framing also entirely overlooks structural characteristics of migration with their regional or international push and pull factors. This last aspect is particularly pertinent to the Polish case in the context of the uneven development and actual devolution of spaces and locations that followed the fall of state socialism.

Nevertheless, for most of the participants of this study small towns and villages stood in for LGBT-hostile territories; as expressed by Przemek: 'I think that the [rural/small town - urban] migration is related to safety, which for LGBT people in some sense exists only in big cities' (Przemek, LGBT activist, 2015). Thus, rural and small town spaces are places to be left behind and not engaged with, places where the battle was somehow already lost, even if the extent to which it actually happened is hardly ever questioned. Moreover, and equally importantly, they are also places *fixed* in time. This point is well illustrated by Martyna's account of her own motivation to migrate to a city:

Martyna: I'm from a village - simply a shithole.

MM: And how were things in your village?

Martyna: You know, another story is that when I was 19 I left that shithole and I never went back. And I am only progressively moving to ever-bigger cities... However, 20 years ago in a village, it seemed that I was the only lesbian in the world; the majority of people have that feeling, right? Simply, there was no Internet... it was different... it was crap... If someone is aware from childhood [of being LGBT], cause usually one is aware... so I think that automatically, they want to get away from the village. You know, go study, or simply work, or anything. Cause what is the alternative? The alternative is depression... mental illness, in the worst case it's suicide. I can honestly say the choices are poor, right? So what else is there to be done? Nothing else can be done; you can only run away from there, simply leave (Martyna, LGBT activist, 2015).

For Martyna, personal experience of isolation and exclusion of what it was like to be a lesbian in a village 20 years ago becomes grounds for generalization that positions rural Poland as site of injury, but also as a place unchanged by the passing of two decades. A point particularly important in light of the fact that every single one of the participants in this study agreed that the last two decades or so brought an improvement in the situation of LGBT people in Poland (related to increased visibility, better organizing, emergence of LGBT role models in the public sphere, or changes in attitudes in general, just to mention a few). Yet for many, the rural and small town locations were viewed as left out of the process, as spaces where ‘nothing ever changes’. Importantly, my aim here is not to deny that rural Poland can be a site where LGBT people experience discrimination, rather what I am trying to argue is that the view of the rural as fixed and as always LGBT hostile and incapable of any change is problematic and metrocentric. This is significant not only on an individual level, but also politically, as it discounts the small town/rural Poland as a site of possible organizing and interventions. When paired with the devolution of rural and small town spaces in Poland in the last three decades, a point I return to in the next chapter, the result is a narrative that validates and perpetuates the view of these spaces as derived of initiative and implicitly backwards.

Interestingly, to come back to Martyna’s quote above, the feeling of marginalization, of being the only one (lesbian) in the world is nowadays, as Martyna rightly suggests, mitigated by the advent of the Internet; here a change can be observed in the way younger people experience their ‘otherness’ also in smaller places. Two accounts below, both from past RT participants who grew up in small towns, one from Aleksander in his mid-thirties and a second one from Paweł, in his late twenties illustrate this:

One very important thing [I discovered], I was not alone. When I went there [to a group meeting], I learned that I am not the only gay in my town, or in general... (Aleksander, past RT participant, 2015)

You know that place I am from, something like 20,000 people [live there]. I always knew there must be other gays there, and definitely in Szczecin<sup>121</sup>, cause you [can] go online and you can probably find them, so it was not that I did not

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<sup>121</sup> Szczecin is the nearest big city (ca. 400,000 inhabitants) to where Paweł grew up.

know other gays existed, I just did not know any personally and that sucked (Paweł, past RT participant, 2016).

There is a difference of the awareness of existence of ‘others like me’ in the two examples above, it is also clear that in case of Paweł the Internet was the medium through which such awareness developed; for Aleksander, as well as for Martyna, who grew up before the Internet became widely available the sense of isolation and uniqueness was thus much more acute.<sup>122</sup>

Additionally, beyond the small town/rural and urban divide, absence of LGBT organizations comes to mark whole regions of the country as somehow inferior and at times this takes the form of the already mentioned binary of Poland A and Poland B, as in Adrian's account:

Well, [we've got] Poland A and B. There are some cool [LGBT] organizations in the Tricity, in Łódź, in Szczecin, in Wrocław, in Poznań... in Krakow, and in Katowice – so the Western wall [of the country], but in Białystok, in Olsztyn, in Lublin it's rather empty (Adrian, LGBT activist, 2015).<sup>123</sup>

When asked about the reasons for this division between Poland A and B Adrian responded:

I think that the society differs a lot in these two parts of the country; definitely there are the economic factors, exclusion of Eastern Poland results in a certain imbalance of development. I mean, a developed society is a civic society, the more it's civic the more it is developed, the less it's developed the poorer it is, the more it is excluded economically, educationally also... the less it is civic...

MM: And you think that this is the case in the East [of Poland]?

Adrian: Yes, but that's my personal opinion (Adrian, LGBT activist, 2015).

Adrian's account above is problematic, as it oversimplifies the issue of regional difference – for example it does not take into account the fact that in the past

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<sup>122</sup> At the same time the expansion of the Internet is changing the very nature of people's engagement with LGBT organizations, making certain forms of participation but also of support available to people regardless of location, a point well argued by Sylwia when she stated:

The problem is in small towns, right? Even though here those [LGBT] organizations that offer help, also psychological, online are working to address this. In a way they expand their work online, engaging others, for example, I don't know, some kind of donations for the work [LGBT organizations do]... anyone who even sits in some kind of village, who wants to do something, can always donate 10 zloty and they would have already done something... or if they sign a petition [online] (Sylwia, LGBT activist, 2015).

<sup>123</sup> Adrian was surprised when I pointed out that branches of WiT operate in both Olsztyn and Lublin.

there were branches of KPH operating in both Olsztyn and Lublin and it also overlooks WiT's activities in these locations. It also paints the whole swaths of the country as underdeveloped, lacking access to education (even though every single city he mentions is also a university city), creating a binary that disintegrates under closer scrutiny. What Adrian's narrative generates is a subjective geography of emancipation and discrimination that splits the country into two. Such narratives are commonplace among the majority of LGBT activists interviewed. In addition, the subjective geographies of emancipation and discrimination present in LGBT activists' accounts are closely linked to ideas of one-way migration as in the narrative of Karolina below:

Karolina: Now people come out even in small towns. But of course it is harder, cause people from these small towns run away to bigger cities, or abroad, and for example in such Opole, or Zielona Góra, it's hard.

MM: Why these specific examples?

Karolina: [...] I had to find pollsters... and participants [for a study on LGBT people] in each voivodeship<sup>124</sup>... so I know in which ones we could and in which ones we could not find any... We have been wondering why that is... and the answer is that from these voivodeships people... lesbians and gays leave for bigger cities, already during college (Karolina, LGBT activist, 2015).

Here again, certain locations are marked as ones from which gays and lesbians, at least the ones who can, if they for example get to go to college, leave.<sup>125</sup> What is left unrecognized is that not all gays and lesbians go to college, nor do they all leave, or necessarily *can* or even *want to* leave. In addition, the fact that no one or few people responded to call for participants in a study does not mean that there are no LGBT people living in these locations or that they are living in deep closets; there are plenty of reasons why someone might not want to be part of a

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<sup>124</sup> A voivodeship is an administrative unit, equivalent of a province; Poland is divided into sixteen voivodeships.

<sup>125</sup> Upon probing an image emerges that redraws the map of Poland according to how easy it was to recruit people for a research project:

MM: And which voivodeships were that?

Karolina: Certainly Opole, for sure Subcarpathia, it was hard even in Lublin region, it was hard in Warmia-Mazury, it was hard, but not that hard in West Pomerania, Swietokrzyskie, there it was really hard...

MM: Where was it the easiest?

Karolina: Warsaw, Gdansk, Krakow, Poznan, Silesia... Wroclaw was ok [but that's] nothing surprising (Karolina, LGBT activist, 2015).



research project, in particular if it is on matters that are viewed as personal, or sensitive, a point I discuss in relation to this project in Chapter 4. Moreover, the conflating of LGBT positionalities with educational achievement, as done by Karolina in the quote above, is as already mentioned an assumption that makes any other combinations invisible. This is also consequential for how negative attitudes towards LGBT people become located spatially and also how these are *imagined* to be classed, a point I discuss next.

#### 7.4.1 Classing locations

MM: Does your father know about your sexual orientation now?

Aleksander: No. I think he knows but does not want to know. My mother knows. Dad not, cause when I said... that there wouldn't be any grandchildren... he said something striking: 'I don't want to know the truth, I am not interested in the truth, leave me hope'. I understand this, cause I am an educated person and I live in a city and whether I am gay or not, I'll be fine, but my father as [agricultural occupation] in a small town will not be fine with that, simply. So I leave it [as it is] and my mom knows and accepts it completely (Aleksander, past RT participant, 2015).

In the quote above, Aleksander's father reaction to Aleksander's homosexuality is explained by invoking his occupation as well as location, and his lack of acceptance is supposedly 'understandable' when filtered through these. However, and paradoxically, the same categories are not mobilized when Aleksander's mother complete acceptance of his homosexuality is discussed, despite the fact that both parents live in the same small town and have similar educational background. Arguably, what emerges here is a gendered notion of class, with the father, the head of the household marked by his class location in a more pronounced way than his wife. Nevertheless, the link between education and implicitly class, location and homophobia is one that is made frequently and a one that kept reoccurring in the interviews I conducted for this study. Robert was one of the participants who made it particularly unambiguous when discussing what it is like being LGBT in Poland for young people:

[H]ow to say it without sounding discriminatory? [Pauses] Well, let's say it's harder in vocational schools, easier in high schools. Easier in big cities, harder in smaller places, but in general more young people at the stage of high school speaks about themselves [being gay], at least to few friends at school and most

often they receive some support already at this stage, which was very difficult [to get] a dozen or so years ago... In a big city, [in] a high school... often such person comes out to the whole class and the majority has nothing against it, a minority mumbles something to themselves, there might be some name-calling, but that's about it. Smaller place, vocational school, rarely such person would decide to say something about themselves, and if it somehow gets found out, potentially there might be beatings, oppression, bullying, overt discrimination, physical and psychological violence. And even those who support them are afraid to stand up for them publicly (Robert, member of WiT, 2015).

Here again, class is displaced onto the discourse of education, with vocational education standing in for working class. Such positioning of homophobia as a domain of certain spaces ('smaller places', vocational schools) and a domain of certain group of people rather than others is problematic, as it (re)produces and reinforces both classist and metrocentric assumptions.

At the same time, and importantly, for many of the participants in this study such imaginative geographies of discrimination and emancipation that class homophobia and relegate it to rural/small town Poland are at odds with their own experiences, as demonstrated by Kamil's response to the question whether he thinks LGBT people are discriminated in Poland:

Well, certainly, certainly their lives are more difficult, [but] it depends where, right? *I think, that in big urban centres this problem does not exist.* But somewhere, someone who lives in a small city, or in a village... I know that it's hard. These people usually try to get away from these places... I am also an example of this... I am from a place that has nearly 70,000 inhabitants, but I know people who live there from my [gay] milieu, and I think that it's a hard life... *However, I myself in Warsaw also live in hiding...* I am, so to say a person who lives in a closet and sometimes I hear various opinions and these opinions are very often - despite the fact that I work in a cultural institution, where people are expected to be so to speak educated, and [thus] somehow differently thinking about the world - *I am met with the fact that these [gay] people are looked at with contempt*, with total misunderstanding, and with, I think yes, with contempt and lack of respect (Kamil, past participant of RT 2015; emphasis added).

In the quote above urban centres are presented as places where the problem of discrimination does not exist, yet Kamil's own experiences of homophobia in his work place, a cultural institution, in Warsaw, are at odds with the understanding that he presents of both of the spaces. Such dissonance between what the places are imagined to be and what they are experienced as was a common thread. Another example was that of Kasia, who grew up in a big urban centre went to art college and worked within what could be considered the artistic milieu. During the interview she claimed that her life was free of discrimination and joked that it was 'paved with rose petals' but also recounted

and episode when her work contract was not renewed and she suspects her sexuality, which she was open about might have been the reason for it (Kasia, member of WiT, 2015). Hence, the links between location, class and discrimination, or emancipation are not as straightforward as they are at times imagined and it is only by paying attention to the contradictions in people's accounts that we are able to deconstruct the assumptions that they rest upon and challenge their classist as well as metrocentric premises. There is also a need for investigating the imaginative, subjective geographies of discrimination and emancipation both in Poland but arguably also elsewhere, as it is only by scrutinizing these and comparing them to lived experiences of LGBT people we can move beyond their totalizing truth claims.

### **7.5 Questioning the classist and metrocentrist assumptions**

In this chapter I discussed issues of class and location in relation to RT and LGBT movement in Poland. I argue that RT groups in Poland (in particular *Pascha* and *Odwaga*) attract mainly people who are educated and who also have the necessary financial resources to cover the costs of the programmes and/or the therapy that they are expected to undergo (in *Pascha's* case). I demonstrate how this is at odds with the understanding of group RT as a domain of the uneducated, implicitly working class that the some LGBT activists and WiT members have of the practice. I thus argue that on the one hand the financial aspects of the practice makes it inaccessible to people who lack the necessary resources and its concurrence with the ideas of self-governance and self-investment, as I demonstrate in Chapter 6, make it particularly suited to the middle class audiences. Here again and in line with the feminist critiques of neoliberalization, the central subject is that of a middle class male. I also discuss the classed character of Christian (WiT) as well as mainstream LGBT organizing in Poland. Moreover, I demonstrate how the idea of the urban character of LGBT organizing is complicated by the fact that a significant number of people who work in it have rural/small town background, even if this does not translate into campaigns, or activities that would aim to engage LGBT people in small town and rural Poland. Finally, I examine the ways in which discourse of location is characterized and influenced by imaginative

geographies of emancipation and discrimination, which in turn are also classed. I argue that the ways in which class and location are often understood as either LGBT-hostile or friendly reinforces the binaries of urban/rural and educated/uneducated (implicitly working/middle class), positioning them as synonymous with certain attitudes towards LGBT issues. In this binary view of the social and the spatial world one's (the urban/educated) presumed openness is enabled by the fixing in place and time of the other's (the rural/uneducated) discriminatory nature. This imaginative geography and its classist, metrocentrist assumptions is prevalent, even if the lived experiences of the participants of this study suggest that the premise it is based on is arguably flawed and certainly in need of further investigation. I return to the questions of location in the next and last chapter of this thesis where I link them more explicitly to the larger socio-economic changes and processes of neoliberalization.

## **Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusion**

[T]he interface between social structures and the experience of daily life... is a place where profit and pleasure, global and local forces powerfully and intimately converge. This is a region that late capital's modernizing impulses have most aggressively invaded and where global capitalism's contradictions are played out in structures of feeling that often elude rigorous critical examination (Hennessy, 2000, p. 36).

### **8.1 Sexualities and the logic of the market: Discussion**

This study is informed by and organized around an investigation into the ways in which sexual politics in contemporary Poland are shaped and remade under conditions of the neoliberalization process, which, importantly, always occur in relation to the existing regimes of gender and class relations. Thus far, in Chapter 7 I discuss how the practice of RT and the Polish LGBT movement are classed and how (in both) class is frequently misplaced onto discourses of education, and educational achievement, reflecting the unease with which class is handled in Poland in general. I then discuss how in Poland certain locations come to be constructed as LGBT friendly, whilst others are marked as homophobic and how these processes again are contingent upon classist and metrocentric understanding of both the Polish postsocialist reality and LGBT subjectivities within it. Also in Chapter 7, I closely engage with the material aspects of RT and its resulting classed character, building on my discussion of the practice as an exercise in self-management and discipline in a truly neoliberal sense that I develop in Chapter 6. In Chapter 6 I also examine how the practice of RT in Poland is gendered, how it makes female homosexuality invisible and how it relies on a traditional patriarchal model of the family. In Chapter 5 I analyze the ways in which WiT's project is contingent upon and generative of a set of homonormative ideas, and ideals grounded in a strong investment in the narrative of normality and respectability, embodied in monogamous domesticity. I argue that WiT's emancipatory potential is severely limited by its commitment to seeking acceptance within the Church – an institution that epitomizes the excesses of patriarchal power.

Whilst the sites of my inquiry into, and engagement with, sexuality in contemporary Poland are varied, what holds them together is the ways in which

they are mediated through and circumscribed by a combination of patriarchal gender relations and capitalist structures. At the same time, there is more to be said about the contradictory ways in which neoliberalization generally – and market logic specifically – influence Polish grassroots politics of sexuality and building on the analytical work done in the previous chapters it is these issues that I discuss next. More precisely, I focus on the contradictory ways in which the market affects what is possible and desirable on a personal, local, as well as a global level.

### **8.1.1 Filling in the gap**

The majority of LGBT activists and WiT members interviewed for this study were in agreement over the fact that huge regional differences exist in access to LGBT organizations in Poland; however, few were able to identify how this could be altered. One of the most experienced LGBT activists interviewed for this study identified the issue as follows:

I think that what is missing is an organization like KPH was in the past. KPH was a nationwide organization; it had branches in all voivodeships. It was geared more towards these things, towards people, more than the present KPH [is]. And there is no other nationwide organization, besides KPH isn't a nationwide organization anymore either. I think this is missing, because... KPH was the only organization that animated, animated a local movement really in these smaller cities (Karolina, LGBT activist, 2015).

Thus, Karolina identifies a spatial gap in the LGBT movement that consists of a lack of a nationwide initiative that would nevertheless be close to people locally, in ways that KPH used to be. Whilst Karolina's observation could easily be dismissed as a nostalgic gesture – for the overall consensus amongst my interviewees was that things have improved over the last two decades – I think that her point is of significance for it draws our attention to a different, arguably less linear, way of thinking about the Polish LGBT movement's development and I want to argue that paying attention to it can be helpful in understanding how the LGBT movement in Poland is constrained by the processes of neoliberalization and marketization. There are couple of points that are particularly relevant here; firstly, the uneven development characteristic of post socialist Poland cannot be separated from the *de facto* deterioration of many spaces – marked most notably for the LGBT movement by the disappearance of

KPH branches over time – but experienced on a much larger scale in terms of the disappearance of a whole range of services from public transport to community centres in many locations across the country.<sup>126</sup> For my discussion, this is of relevance because it points to the way in which whilst in terms of LGBT organizing ‘the centre’ fared relatively well in the process and became more professionalized over time, other spaces followed a different trajectory that left them severely under provisioned also in terms of LGBT specific support. Arguably, one of the unintended outcomes of this has been that the centre with its relatively steady presence of LGBT organizations has become more removed from the lives of people outside of its core middle class, urban audiences, and, potentially, inaccessible for those who might be in the greatest need of support. Indeed, several of my interviewees made similar observations and Kinga, an LGBT activist providing psychological help gave a good example of the issue when she recounted working with one of her clients:

KPH can actually be intimidating for many people, cause it can give off an impression of an organization that is unavailable to a regular person, or a one that is too [pauses]... I also had this situation with a guy, who went to a meeting at Lambda, some kind of opening up group, and he said that he came there and there, well, he called these people ‘way ahead’<sup>127</sup> – and I don’t think that they were so super ‘way ahead’ actually, but in his perspective [they were], for him even to say he was gay, or to come there was a huge step... and people there were talking about sex, or they were saying let’s go for beers together, or I don’t know, to the parade, which [for him] was, something... he is not yet there (Kinga, LGBT activist, 2015).

Whilst KPH is often regarded as an organization that concentrates its effort on lobbying and legal change (see Chapter 5), Lambda is known for its support and on-the-ground profile, yet the quote above suggests that it might also be intimidating to people like Kinga’s client. This might signal a situation where

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<sup>126</sup> The deterioration of spaces in Poland is a larger issue that the LGBT movement is arguably not the best example of, considering its relatively short history (see Chapter 3). However, it is a real process that followed marketization of many spheres of the economy and hit spaces on the margins particularly hard. An example of such a process is the village I come from that in the 1980s had a train station, post office, a state owned shop, kindergarten, primary school (up to 4<sup>th</sup> grade), and very frequent, and regular bus services to many locations (including the capital of the region and to Warsaw). All of these services are gone, the shop has been replaced with a private one and there is a modest mini-bus service that runs Monday to Friday exclusively to the nearest town. A new addition in the 1990s was a Catholic chapel. Whilst the aim is not to romanticize the previous era, there is a real material dimension to the transition that is rarely spoken about and one that constitutes a clear loss in terms of the standard of living for many communities.

<sup>127</sup> The exact phrase used by Kinga was ‘*hop do przodu*’.

many people are left with no support, including some in the actual ‘centre’. At the same time, the room for new organizations to emerge is very restricted whilst local organizations struggle to survive in the context defined by the logic of the market, a point I return to below.

Secondly, whilst there is an overarching agreement that large parts of the country are left with limited or no access to LGBT organizations, the understanding of the issue is often premised upon the view that this state of affairs is somehow down to the individual choices of people who live in these localities. Thus, there is the assumption that one can always start an organization – should one think the existing ones are not doing what is needed, or not doing enough for you as an individual. A good example of this is Martyna’s response to the question if the existing LGBT organizations in Poland represent the interests of all LGBT people: ‘I think that yes... and if someone thinks that they [LGBT organizations] don’t meet their needs then they should simply start their own organization’ (Martyna, member of WiT, 2015). This sentiment was expressed on several occasions during my interviews with LGBT activists as well as members of WiT. Similarly, when asked about accessibility of LGBT organizations nationwide, Karolina responded: ‘I think that they are accessible and I think that it is not difficult to start your own organization’ (Karolina, LGBT activist, 2015). Yet earlier on during the interview, when discussing the financial aspect of LGBT organizing Karolina describes the current situation as follows:

In Poland today it is incredibly hard to get funding for an LGBT organization... Now, if the EU funding runs out, and it has started running out already – and also the Norwegian funds, because a lot of LGBT organizations received money and are still getting money from these, but it was the last round [of the funds]. So, to be honest for a new organization it is difficult... KPH has blazed the trails [for itself]; it is a recognized organization and it’s a known thing that there are a lot of funders who give [money]... once they know the organization. But the reason I am talking about funding is because it is what determines the working of an organization, the extent to which it can operate professionally... in a stable manner and the extent to which it can operate long term (Karolina, LGBT activist, 2015).

There is a noticeable contradiction in the two quotes from Karolina above and I find this noteworthy inasmuch that it reflects the conditions in which the Polish LGBT movement operates. Namely, caught up in the demands of its neoliberal



context which can be seen operating on two levels here: the ideological one, where supposedly anyone is free to start an organization to suit their needs and represent their interests – yet again mobilizing the entrepreneurial, self-realizing understanding of personhood that is blind to difference; and the material one, where the survival chances of any project are very much down to the crude logic of the market, with no state support and competition for scarce resources between the existing organizations, where things like building up a brand – and it can be argued that KPH has successfully worked out a brand name for itself – and access to funding make it extremely hard to succeed, prosper and prevail. What this illustrates is how the neoliberal context with its omnipresent market logic forces the third sector organizations into a form of competition that can best be described as the survival of the fittest. The extent to which such a status quo is undesirable from the point of view of meeting the needs of Polish LGBT people is obvious.

Furthermore, the competition for funds does not only happen at the local or national level, but because of the international character of many of the funds Polish LGBT organizations rely on, it is also affected by global developments, a point highlighted by Karolina when she remarked that the overall trend is for the money to be moving further East in Europe (Karolina, LGBT activist, 2015), to places that appear to be in even greater need of support than Poland – with Ukraine and Russia being mentioned particularly frequently by Polish LGBT activists. Thus, whilst access to the international funds is diminishing, and little or no state support is available, there is nothing there to replace them whereas in terms of LGBT specific support, the full burden of provision falls onto the voluntary sector, with a particularly strong emphasis on the voluntary characteristic – considering that outside of Warsaw only one of the organizations I was in contact with during this project was offering remuneration to exactly one of its activists and even that was on a part-time, and time-limited basis. This in turn poses a question around the amount of unpaid labor that is required to sustain even a modest network of LGBT organizations in a context where no state support is present.

On the other hand, there was a strong sense of agreement amongst many of my participants that Polish civic society is not particularly well equipped to carry the burden of voluntary work. Whilst many offered cultural and/or

historical explanations for this state of affairs – whereby the historical aspect of such explanations centered around the critique of how the previous regime foreclosed the development of civic initiatives – some made links between it and the material reality in which it exists. To quote Karolina once again:

We are a country that is working its way up, still a poor one and we cannot afford to sponsor organizations out of our own pockets as it is done in the US. We also cannot afford – based on the fact that Poles work the longest hours in Europe, I think – to devote too much time to voluntary activities, not to mention the low values of social capital (Karolina, LGBT activist, 2015).<sup>128</sup>

In the quote above Karolina links the ‘makeshift’ character of the Polish LGBT movement – as she characterized it just moments earlier – to the socio-economic demands of postsocialism. This also points to the ways in which in Poland the voluntary sector, and LGBT organizations specifically, are immersed in very material struggles, as they are dependent upon resources (financial, social and political) under a set of historical circumstances that are evidently not in their favor. Thus, the picture that emerges is not a particularly optimistic one. Finally, and not unrelatedly the quote signals towards the key factors relevant to the classed make up of the Polish LGBT movement that I discuss in Chapter 7 (see also Adrian quoted in Chapter 5) – whereby volunteering becomes a kind of luxury that few can afford.

Importantly, and as discussed in the Introduction, WiT is the only LGBT group in Poland today with anything close to a nationwide presence and I think one way to make sense of its growth is by also examining its success through the lens of demand and supply. I began Chapter 5 by discussing how WiT could be considered a response to the marginalization of Christian LGBT people in Poland in the context where the LGBT movement is often constructed as secular and at times in direct opposition to religion. However, what is arguably equally important and relevant to my discussion here is how WiT fills an existing gap providing support to LGBT people in places where no other organizations with an LGBT profile operate. Significantly, in places where other organizations exist WiT functions specifically as a group for religious LGBT people. Thus, in large urban centres with relatively well functioning LGBT organizations, WiT

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<sup>128</sup> Karolina’s observation is not far from the facts: in 2015, in the EU, only in Greece did people work more hours (per worker) than in Poland (OECD, 2017).

members responsible for running the local groups spoke of periods of inactivity, or low activity (so for example no meetings for an extended period of time) – this is particularly true for the Gdańsk based group. They also insisted on the religious character of the group as its distinctive feature (this was stressed by WiT members in Warsaw, Gdańsk and Poznań). At the same time, in places such as Lublin and Olsztyn the reported interest in the group and demand for its support was steady and notably higher, according to local WiT members, (see for example quote from Sebastian in Chapter 5, p. 153) and the group was a go to place for people who do not necessarily self-identify as religious, rather, it functioned both as a group for LGBT Christians and as a safe place for LGBT people in general. In this sense, WiT's growth cannot be separated from the absence of alternatives locally and this, in turn, cannot be separated from the material conditions of postsocialist Poland.

WiT's community-based/support group approach enables it to function relatively cost-free, whilst certain redistributive impulses (as discussed in Chapter 5) make it an organization that, at times, reaches places and individuals that would otherwise be isolated both geographically, and economically. Consequently, it is currently WiT that operates as the only LGBT organization in places such as Olsztyn, Lublin and Rzeszów, reaching into the territory that Adrian, an LGBT activist quoted in Chapter 5, and many others construct as 'Poland B'. On one hand it could be argued – and many of my participants indeed have done so – that these parts of the country are marked by an absence of LGBT organizations, because they are spaces from which LGBT people simply move away in search of better lives, both economically and in terms of greater freedom, and I deal with the assumptions such understandings rest on elsewhere (see Chapters 5 and 7). It could of course also be argued that in these spaces, with their supposedly conservative populations no other formation could emerge and thrive, but that is at odds with the historical reality of KPH and its local branches that functioned precisely in these cities.<sup>129</sup> Thus, in many ways WiT is reminiscent of the early days of KPH with its network of local branches,

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<sup>129</sup> It is also inaccurate, inasmuch that whilst Lublin and Rzeszów are in fact located in regions with some of the highest levels of support for the conservative Law and Justice (based on the 2015 parliamentary election results, see for example *Wybory na mapie*, 2015), and Rzeszów is also a place where the percentage of people who attend mass weekly is significantly above the country's average 40% (Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego SAC, 2015), Olsztyn shares neither of these characteristics.

an organization that is close to the lives of the people it aims to support and represent. Moreover, whilst WiT lacks the resources that the well-established organizations such as KPH or Lambda have, it has succeeded to mobilize people into activism across a range of places around the intersection of religion and sexuality, thus achieving a very unique profile and effectively capitalizing on a niche in the ‘market’.

At the same time, and as analyzed in Chapter 5, WiT is a formation with a very particular political character and aims: seeking acceptance within the Church, an institution that has notoriously interfered in gender and LGBT equality politics (to the detriment of both) and opposed any measures that would further these in Poland, points, in my opinion, to the sharp emancipatory limits of WiT. I would in fact postulate that WiT’s project is one that is based on an inherent contradiction; whilst on one hand it is challenging the Church’s discriminatory position on LGBT sexualities, on the other hand, the challenge is mediated through, and potentially also undermined by, the logic of what I have termed godly homonormativity and WiT’s inattention to issues of gender discrimination, and patriarchal structures of oppression within the church. WiT’s godly homonormativity is grounded in a model of respectable, monogamous life and coupledness, promised on disowning difference and subversive elements that become too unseemly to be reconciled with the aspirations for acceptance into the Catholic fold. This strong focus on monogamous, long-term, loving, ‘normal’ relationships, (re)creates a hierarchy of ways of being LGBT, whilst also reinforcing heteronormativity. The godly homonormativity generated by WiT colludes with homonormativity at large, in producing subjects committed to ‘normality’, respectability and domesticity and its reliance on the self-responsibilizing individual. Historically, the trope of domesticity is perhaps particularly interesting in the context of Poland as it can be linked to the ways in which the private sphere under the previous regime became infused with ideas of authenticity, as a space removed from the direct interference of the oppressive state regime. It also demonstrates how locally produced understandings can be given new meanings to support new (homo)normative regimes.

### **8.1.2. Commodifying homophobia**

In Chapter 6 my focus has been on reparative therapy as a technique of the self and the ways in which the self it constructs is ultimately fully compatible with the neoliberal understanding of the individual. What is particularly striking is the fact that, in effect, RT speaks directly to a male middle class subject. Here again, colluding with the neoliberal understanding of the subject as well as with the patriarchal gender order of a large proportion of Christianity, it is the male subject that is at the centre of attention, even if the subject is in fact in need of reparation. At the same time, to recap, whilst it is at times constructed as a domain of the uneducated and misinformed, RT attracts highly educated people and is in fact inaccessible to many working class people, because of its financial aspect, associated with the costs of therapy. In Chapter 6 I have argued that drawing heavily on the psychotherapeutics for its language and methods, reparative therapy is an enterprise of self-remaking premised upon hard work, self-discipline and personal responsibility. The resulting crises when the goal fails to materialize are thus a personal liability, keeping the oppressive structures within which they are generated hidden from view. As demonstrated in Chapter 6, for some participants this becomes a painful stage in self-discovery that nevertheless is followed by a one of greater self-acceptance, for others the experience of failure of RT becomes a defining one that leaves them deeply affected and unable to come to terms with who they are.

The gendered nature of RT that constructs women as overprotective mothers – i.e. the very causes of their sons' homosexuality – or self-sacrificing wives – in relation to heterosexual marriage as the optimal goal – reinforces gendered power relations within both the religious and secular spheres. Thus, in many ways RT represents a site where the old regime of patriarchal power combines with the newer neoliberal narrative of the self-made man, and it is a site where both are reinforced. The economic and emotional costs are high and the process occurs at the expense of the individual health and wellbeing of the men who fall for the promise of sexual reorientation. Whilst women do not figure as clients in the groups under scrutiny in this study, they come to bear the burden of responsibility as inadequate mother figures or are instrumentalized as

wives that function as trophies; the ultimate evidence of change coming to realization in the Church and society endorsed heterosexual marriage.

Having originated in the US, the type of RT that this project focuses on came to prominence precisely at the moment in history when neoliberalism as an ideology and policy was in full swing. It is also in the US that RT grew to become a large enterprise (as discussed in Chapter 3), whilst the scale of the phenomenon is not comparable to that of RT in Poland, the premises remain very much the same. The timing is also significant; the arrival of RT in Poland coincides with the strong neoliberal pull of the first decades after the fall of state socialism. In this sense the publications and lectures by US reparative therapists are part of their own entrepreneurial projects of expansion into new, global markets. Whilst RT has not grown significantly in Poland since, it has nevertheless prevailed and new RT initiatives continue to surface; since the start of this study a new group called *Strumienie Życia*, Living Waters, emerged and its website suggests it is currently growing (Strumienie Życia, 2017b). Living Waters was established in 1980 in the US by Andrew Comiskey, who – according to the Polish group’s website – took on the struggle to find his lost heterosexual identity after experiencing personal conversion to Christianity; the group ran a pilot programme in Poland in 2012 which resulted in a new edition of the programme in 2014; the programmes are fee-paying, yet the cost is not given on the website (Strumienie Życia, 2017a, 2017c). As of today there is very little information, academic or otherwise, on the activities of this formation. Nevertheless, such developments are important as they signal that RT groups in Poland are not going anywhere, at least in the near future, and that indeed there is a steady demand for their services. At the same time, their potentially exploitative character and dubious professional, and ethical standards continue unchecked.

What is also of particular importance here is the unmistakable market logic behind RT – with US groups seeking new outlets for their programmes, publications, and expertise, and with the local enterprises picking up a model and delivering it to their specific group of clients. Consequently, RT in Poland is very much a service, a product that someone purchases from someone else, money changes hands and a profit is made and as such it constitutes an example of what I classify as the *commodification of homophobia*. In many ways, RT

illustrates Illouz' observation that 'self-realization and its commodification has become a global enterprise' (Illouz, 2007, pp. 48-49), even if the self being marketed is unattainable and premised upon a deeply homophobic, and patriarchal set of convictions. Yet, in many ways so are many other types of knowledges available on the self-help market. Furthermore, because it follows the logic of the market, RT privileges people with the necessary level of disposable income, making it a domain of the middle class, not unlike psychotherapeutics at large. What is also significant and highly relevant to my discussion here is the way in which RT in Poland is an example of how neoliberalism and processes of neoliberalization are neither inherently homophilic nor homophobic, for they are both. Correspondingly, just as profit can be found in the commodification of LGBT lives and identities (I refer to the relevant literature on this topic in Chapter 2), it can also be found in homophobia. Rather than being a contradiction, this is in fact fully compatible and an inherent feature of the market and its never-ending quest for new commodities – and ultimately for revenue.

In addition, the very individualizing and self-responsibilizing logic that lies at the core of RT (as discussed in Chapter 6) enables its proponents to challenge any critical voices by drawing on the ideas of individual self-determination and the right to choose RT (as discussed in Chapter 3). The logic behind it is captured in the words of one of my participants who stated: 'Just because it did not work for me, it does not mean that it cannot work for someone else... if people want to try [RT], why not let them try it... it is their life and their choice' (Szymon, past RT participant, 2016). Another past RT participant when asked about the future of RT in Poland responded:

I think that these... groups will continue to operate consistently. There will always be people who don't accept themselves, who will want to challenge it [their sexuality] in some way, right? Or just to test it out, how things work, where it comes from, etc.... and even though I am skeptical [of RT], I think that it's good [that RT groups continue to exist], let them explore it, check what it is all based on (Piotr, past participant of RT, 2016).

Thus, whilst Szymon has made his peace with the idea that RT did not work for him, and Piotr declares that he is skeptical towards it, both are reluctant to deny others *the choice* to try it. Such framing is consequential as it reinforces the

individualistic understanding of the process that once again obscures the workings of institutionalized homophobia that RT ultimately rests upon. Whilst it works on the level of market logic – it acknowledges the demand and legitimizes the supply in the process – it fails to question the structural inequalities that might generate and sustain the demand. The personal costs and tragedies that RT is responsible for go unnoticed and unaccounted for, put down to individual failures.

It is in this context that the need to regulate the field in which RT operates, as well as a need for official denouncement of its premises by the Polish professional bodies, becomes ever more pressing, and the statement condemning RT issued in 2016 by the Polish Sexological Association is a welcome intervention (Polskie Towarzystwo Seksuologiczne, 2016). Yet, in the current political environment regulation banning RT is unlikely to materialize a point illustrated by the already mentioned fact that at the time of writing up of this study, *Odwaga* was awarded the Truth-Cross-Liberation award for ‘spiritual and therapeutic help for people with unwanted same sex attractions and their families’ (TVP.Info, 2017). Public endorsement of an RT group at such a high level suggests that RT organizations in Poland will continue to operate and sell their particular view of human sexuality and individual, capitalizing on, circulating, and recycling homophobia.

Whilst my study offers some valuable insights into this largely unstudied practice, the scope for future research of RT as a phenomenon is huge. Similarly, more work is needed on the homonormative impulses of the Polish LGBT movement. Thus, in the next section and before offering some concluding thoughts, I outline further lines of inquiry, for which this study hopes to open new avenues.

## **8.2. Areas for further research**

Just as any project that needs to be contained in time and ultimately also in size, this study leaves a range of issues underexplored and undertheorized. Whilst it is impossible to list all of the deliberate omissions and even more so the unintended blind spots, certain areas nevertheless stand out as particularly in need of further investigation. I have already signaled some of avenues for



potential future research above and throughout this thesis, but below I identify some additional, equally pressing knowledge gaps.

Firstly, considering the lack of scholarly analyses on the issue, the link between neoliberalization and politics of sexuality can be thought in a more direct way, also in the Polish context, for example through examining the direct engagement in and impact of global and local capital in relation to LGBT politics in Poland. This in turn appears to be taking place through a) flow of commodities and LGBT specific services (here some preliminary work has been done that suggests a clear class dimension to the way in particular LGBT specific clubs and spaces are used in Poland (Józko, 2009, p. 5), but much more analysis is needed to fully understand the way class inequalities are reproduced in the processes of commodification of LGBT identities and lives in Poland); b) introduction of LGBT-friendly policies in the workplace – as implemented by many multinational corporations who conduct business and hire people in Poland; here an interesting avenue for investigation would also be the way this practice is or is not taken up by local companies and c) sponsoring of LGBT organizations, or LGBT specific events, or initiatives such as for example the LGBT Business Forum (Sielicki, 2014). The LGBT Business Forum ‘works to promote the benefits of diversity in the workplace for both the companies and the employees’ (Sielicki, 2014, p. 23). The LGBT Business Forum report for 2014 starts with listing the benefits (*korzyści*) of LGBT friendliness for businesses and estimates the ‘Polish LGBT market’ at 2.4 million clients with the estimated purchasing power worth over 20 billion euros (Sielicki, 2014).<sup>130</sup> In 2014 the LGBT Business Forum awarded Google Poland the Rainbow Bee award for being the most LGBT friendly company in Poland (Sielicki, 2014, p. 25).<sup>131</sup> Whilst the short summary above signals the complex and potentially problematic engagements of global and local capital in Polish LGBT politics, the phenomenon remains entirely overlooked by scholars of sexuality, constituting a clear knowledge gap that future research will hopefully address.

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<sup>130</sup> The report also includes a full page advertisement for the global brand of hotels and resorts Hilton, which promises rates as ‘low’ as 91 euros (ca. £77) per night (Sielicki, 2014)

<sup>131</sup> Interestingly, from the twenty companies voted for in the online survey not one was Polish, with the top five positions occupied by Google, Apple, IKEA, Coca-Cola and Starbucks respectively (Sielicki, 2014, p. 14).

Secondly – and perhaps more directly linked to the ground covered in this study – this project started off as an inquiry into the practice of RT therapy in Poland. However, the core RT groups whose work it pertains to were all unwilling to meet and be interviewed by me and thus their unique perspective, beyond what they choose to share publicly via their websites, is not included in this study. I have addressed the question of recruitment of participants in my methodology (Chapter 4), still, it is important to point out here that whilst this study offers some valuable insights into the workings of these groups, its limited scope and relatively small number of interviewees with direct experience of RT programmes (this is particularly true for *Odwaga*) makes it far from exhaustive. Considering the prevalence of the practice – with a relatively stable number of organizations supplying RT – and its potentially harmful consequences (as discussed in Chapter 6), the need for further research into the phenomenon of sexual reorientation therapy in Poland is particularly acute; even more so in the current political climate.

Thirdly and relatedly, several participants of this study have reported that efforts at turning homosexual people straight are not confined to the groups this study focuses on, but also take place in private practices of psychotherapists, sexologists and other mental health practitioners. My interview with one such practitioner, who offers RT to their patients, based at a state run mental health facility suggests that this is in fact the case and that more research is needed to map out the extent of institutionalized RT practices. In addition, the global flows of RT remain largely overlooked, yet, considering the efforts of the US organizations in reaching global markets and audiences – as signaled in Chapter 3 – RT *is* a global phenomenon, and further research is needed to map out and understand the spread of this potentially harmful practice. Equally important is that we continue to investigate and challenge the structures that enable, and sustain it both locally as well as globally.

Moreover, whilst this study attempts to make inroads into analyzing class and sexuality as mutually connected, it suffers from a notorious lack of literature that would discuss and theorise class in contemporary Poland, pointing to an urgent need for more materially orientated research efforts and knowledges. As I have demonstrated in this study class remains a relevant and

meaningful category of analysis and its revitalization in the context of social sciences work on and from Poland is long overdue.

In addition, all of the participants interviewed for this study were ethnically Polish and white and as such questions of race were largely absent from the interviews. However, when they did arise, most often in the more informal conversations after the official part of the interview was over, it was in relation to the ongoing refugee crisis (on which the Polish government took a particularly racist and Islamophobic stance). The way in which the topic was often approached was marked by highly problematic views of Muslims as inherently homophobic and thus representing a way of thinking incompatible with European values. At the same time, and as discussed also in this thesis, the prevalence of homophobia in the Polish context is often linked to the prominent position of Catholicism, interestingly though the latter was never positioned in the same way Islam was. Although Poland remains a relatively homogenous country ethnically and racially, the levels of racism and cultural racism are alarmingly high. Thus, a clear research gap exists for a study that would engage with questions of ethnicity, race and sexuality together in the Polish context.

Finally, a stark gap exists in the literature on the Christian branch of LGBT organizing, not only in Poland, but also in Europe in general. Whilst some recent work on the topic is promising (see for example Hall, 2015) much more is needed to counteract the prevailing occlusion of religion from the studies of LGBT movements. This is of relevance, as focusing exclusively on mainstream LGBT organizing, the work done on LGBT movement in Poland and elsewhere risks reproducing the assumption that LGBT subjectivities are at odds with religion, in particular in the contexts where institutional religion takes a negative stance towards LGBT equality, as it is the case in Poland today.

### **8.3 Conclusion: Sexual politics in neoliberalism, a critique**

Processes of neoliberalization produce queer winners and losers, and it is suggested that if sexually progressive alternatives to neoliberalism are to be developed, they need to recognize the tensions and contradictions inherent within processes of neoliberalism. In so doing, the class dimensions of neoliberal sexualities need to be made visible and examined critically (Binnie, 2014, p. 241).

In this study I investigated how neoliberalization impacts upon and circumscribes the politics of sexuality in contemporary Poland. I did so by

examining the ways in which individual subjectivities and collective endeavours of LGBT people are shaped by aspects of neoliberalization such as individualization, commodification, and marketization. I also investigated how differences of gender, class and location position subjects differently in the landscape of the Polish grassroots politics of sexuality. Whilst this study is by no means exhaustive in its attempt to address these questions and the research gap that motivates them, it nevertheless offers some important insights on the matters under scrutiny and its contribution lies also in offering a different way of thinking through politics of sexuality and the LGBT movement in Poland; both of which can constitute potential departure points for future studies. Informed by feminist materialist insistence on scrutinizing capitalism and patriarchal gender relations together, my analysis explores how, through alliances with patriarchal regimes, neoliberalization penetrates the most intimate spheres of people's lives and minds, shaping and remaking individual subjectivities, but also redrafting what is possible locally, as well as globally. Thus, as I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, aspects of neoliberalization such as individualization, commodification, and marketization influence politics of sexuality in Poland profusely, in a myriad of ways and on many levels, and knowledges that omit these connections can at best be considered incomplete.

Throughout this study, I examine how neoliberalization affects LGBT subjects differently depending on how their lives are gendered, classed, and bound by their geographical location in the context of the uneven and complex patterns of development, and decline of spaces in postsocialist Poland. My examinations of Christian and mainstream LGBT organizing, as well as of the practice of RT, suggest that all these axes of difference are indeed consequential, yet they are also rarely held together in analyses of politics of sexuality in contemporary Poland. However, as I have tried to demonstrate throughout this study, probing the ways these intersect has the potential to further our understanding of the complex ways in which individual narratives and lives are linked to larger processes, and structures, addressing an important research gap.

Accordingly, I have argued that the urban, educated, middle class profiles of Polish LGBT activists pose questions around whose voices are represented and whose experiences become normative, and whose are in turn

made invisible and/or considered too unseemly. Seen in this context, the emergence of WiT as a voice of the religious LGBT Christians in Poland is certainly a positive development inasmuch that it broadens the scope of debates around what it means to be LGBT in Poland today, and challenges the view of LGBT people as always in opposition to religion. As I have demonstrated, at times, WiT's profile paired with its almost nationwide presence make it more accessible than other LGBT organizations, to people who would not otherwise be able to access any support. Yet, and as I have argued above, this also brings into relief the gap that exists in many parts of the country, with a severe lack of other forms of LGBT-specific support. Here again linking the development of the LGBT movement to the material reality of contemporary Poland produces a more complete picture that would be obscured from view, if the focus were exclusively on the cultural aspect of WiT. Consequently, I have argued that WiT's operations and success need to be seen in relation to the absence of other structures of LGBT specific support, as well in its ability to respond to the need for a specific organization that would represent the interests of Christian LGBT people in Poland today. Thus, whilst looking at how the gap in provision of LGBT specific support is being addressed by groups like WiT, it is important to keep asking what is causing and sustaining it on the structural level. Moreover, as this study also establishes, WiT's members are significantly more likely than not to belong to the urban middle class, with high levels of academic achievement and cultural capital, once again pointing to the classed limits of the Polish LGBT movement.<sup>132</sup> However, to simply acknowledge this state of affairs, brand it as somehow inadequate and leave it at that, does little for our understanding of the issue and even less for the understanding of its causes. Yet, the Polish LGBT movement (in particular outside of Warsaw) relies almost exclusively on the unpaid labor of people involved in it and the material conditions of living in a neoliberally ordered society, effectively, make voluntary work a form of luxury that few can afford, foreclosing engagement by people who would be differently positioned and limiting the scope of whose

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<sup>132</sup> Even though my interviews also suggest that this might be different for one of WiT's sub-groups, more research is needed to establish the extent WiT in Silesia indeed differs from the group as a whole in terms of class background of its members. Furthermore, should the Katowice-based WiT group be more diverse in terms of its demographics, it is still the exception rather than the rule, as also pointed out by number of my interviewees (see for example quote from Emilia on page 207 in Chapter 7).

interests are represented and whose voices are heard. Combined with a lack of state support, what this results in is a condition of acute under-provision, where LGBT support services are few and far between, if seen in the context of the country as a whole. These services and the organizations that deliver them are also ultimately at the mercy of the market dynamics with constant competition for resources characterizing much of the LGBT movement's endeavours in Poland today. At the same time, omitting these very crucial material aspects of LGBT organizing constitutes a blind spot in much of the scholarship that discusses the LGBT movement and issues in Poland today.

Consequently, I have argued that both the physical absences of LGBT organizing from certain localities and the particularly classed character of the LGBT movement must be seen in relation to the material conditions of postsocialist Poland and to processes of neoliberalization that define these. Subsequently, throughout this study questions of location have been central and I have also probed the ways in which certain spaces get marked as homophobic whilst other are constructed as LGBT-friendly in ways that reproduce both classist and metrocentric understandings of the geography of LGBT sexualities in contemporary Poland. Whilst it cannot be denied that there are significant differences in terms of the availability of LGBT specific support and organizations in places outside of the large urban centres, the tendency to paint all spaces outside of these with the same brush of timeless homophobia is an oversimplification that obscures more than it explains; in this study I have attempted to move beyond the artificial binary such constructions rely on. Most significantly, and as I have argued, such reading makes invisible not only the particular devolution of spaces that I discuss above (and the material underpinnings of this process), but it also obscures the experiences of LGBT people who face discrimination in spaces that – following the logic outlined above – are supposed to be LGBT friendly. My work on RT in Poland is of particular relevance here. Consequently, RT in Poland might have started with *Odwaga* in Lublin, but *Pascha* has been the most active in Warsaw, Kraków and Wrocław – three major urban, and cultural centres, and spaces that many of my participants, regardless of their role in the study, have repeatedly praised for their LGBT friendly environment and scenes. Last, but not least, I have demonstrated that the urban character of the Polish LGBT movement is

complicated by the fact that a substantial number of people who actively participate in it have small town, or rural backgrounds, pointing to the ways in which rural to urban migration might be a significant, yet entirely unstudied aspect of the Polish LGBT movement; the fact that this does not translate into actual initiatives that would engage people in small town and rural locations points to the strength of the existing metrocentric bias.

Furthermore, in this study I have examined how the regime of governance firmly grounded in the patriarchal power of the Catholic Church comes to collude with neoliberal ideas about the self and how, in the process, both are reinforced and secured. Mediated through the neoliberal logic of self-responsibilization, in the case of WiT a particular form of politics is generated – godly homonormativity – that as I have argued overinvests in ideas of respectability, normality and monogamous coupledness, in a bid for acceptance within the Church. WiT’s godly homonormativity is ‘locally’ generated to accommodate the existing constraints, the Catholic ideals of monogamous coupledness and sexual prudishness. Yet, what remains unchanged is the way in which homonormativity is folded into and reinforces the logic of neoliberalism. Additionally, whilst WiT works towards LGBT inclusion, ignoring the way women are sidelined (at best) and often openly discriminated in the hierarchical Church allows the patriarchal power to continue to operate unchallenged. The result is a single-issue struggle in a world where people do not live single-issue lives, to paraphrase Audre Lorde. The frustration that this causes to those members of WiT who are aware of this contradiction is evidenced by Martyna’s lesbian-feminist critique, which I discuss in Chapter 5. Because WiT’s project is premised on the belief that ‘if not for the sexual orientation’ its members would be fully accepted, the fact that this acceptance would look very differently depending on one’s gender seems to go largely unnoticed.<sup>133</sup>

Moreover, neoliberal ideas of the individualized self resurface throughout this study as they are reproduced and mobilized across a range of sites, and narratives, with the notion that anyone can start an LGBT organization, discussed earlier on in this chapter, being one example. In that

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<sup>133</sup> In fact Martyna remarked that homosexuality is a blessing in the lives of WiT’s male members, for if it were not for that they would have never questioned the ways in which the church operates and how it produces homophobia and reproduces heterosexist privilege.

sense this study offers insights on how processes of neoliberalization are reflected in the stories we tell ourselves about the world we live in. As I have argued and demonstrated in this study, a moment where neoliberal ideas of the self come to the fore with a particular strength and vigor is in the self-disciplining, self-surveying, and individualizing practice of RT. RT is not only a technology of the self, but a perfect example of a knowledge promoting neoliberalism in a way that Hennessy defines it as ‘identified with the advocacy of entrepreneurial initiative and individualism – in the form of self-help, volunteerism, or morality rooted in free will and personal responsibility’ (Hennessy, 2000, p. 78). At the same time, what all of these examples point to is how the neoliberal ideas and ideals of the self have become deeply entrenched and often also internalized, sometimes to the detriment of the wellbeing of the subjects who fall for their self-responsibilizing and individualizing promise. In that sense, and informed by the feminist critiques of neoliberalization, this study is also a critical intervention into the body of knowledge that speaks of the ways in which subjectivities are shaped under conditions of neoliberalism; what it adds is an insight into what happens when in RT the logic of the neoliberal self is extended onto questions of sexuality.

Whilst it has been argued extensively that neoliberalism is perfectly capable of incorporating LGBT subjectivities and even promoting LGBT equality for some LGBT subjects (through processes of commodification and/or homonormative impulses), the way in which it incorporates homophobia and profits from it adds a new dimension to these debates. Thus, RT in Poland, but arguably also globally, is an example of how homophobia gets commodified. The fact that under neoliberal conditions anti-LGBT impulses and politics are turned into enterprises, and related products, is nothing but an expression of the inherently contradictory nature of capitalism as well as being the logical extension of its never-ending quest for profit. These complex processes then, rather than being understood as side effects of living in neoliberalism, must be seen as integral and perhaps necessary elements of it. Finally, as this study demonstrates, neoliberalism and processes of neoliberalization affect sexual politics on a personal, local, and global level and as such the former needs to be studied carefully in any bid at making sense of the latter. Whilst the sites of my inquiry are located in the context of contemporary Poland, the global spread of



neoliberalism as both a model for political economy and ideology suggest that the connections I explore in this study might be of significance also in other locations, even if they are likely to play out differently, as they are subject to historical and local variations and tensions. Correspondingly, what this study offers is a critique of neoliberalism and the sexual politics it engenders, a critique premised on the conviction that things should always be considered in their historical and material contexts, and that overlooking these contexts is bound to produce accounts and knowledges that are at best incomplete, and at worst complicit in reproducing the very inequalities we set out to examine and challenge.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Biographical data of the participant

#### Dane biograficzne uczestniczki/uczestnika

1. Imię i nazwisko .....

2. Wiek .....

3. Stan cywilny .....

4. Płeć .....

5. Miejsce zamieszkania (proszę zaznaczyć jedną odpowiedź, jeśli nie zna Pani/Pan liczby mieszkańców proszę podać nazwę miejscowości):

Wieś	Małe miasto (do 30tys)	Duże miasto	Bardzo duże miasto (ponad 500tys)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. Województwo .....

7. Miejsce pochodzenia (proszę zaznaczyć jedną odpowiedź, jeśli nie zna Pani/Pan liczby mieszkańców proszę podać nazwę miejscowości):

Wieś	Małe miasto (do 30tys)	Duże miasto	Bardzo duże miasto (ponad 500tys)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. Województwo .....

9. Wykształcenie (proszę zaznaczyć jedną odpowiedź):

Podstawowe	Zawodowe	Średnie	Wyższe niepełne	Wyższe
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. Wykształcenie Rodziców (proszę zaznaczyć jedną odpowiedź):

Podstaw owe	Zawod owe	Śred nie	Wyż sze niep elne	Wyż sze	Ni e wi e m
----------------	--------------	-------------	----------------------------	------------	-------------------------

matka	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ojciec	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**12. Zawód**

- a) **Wyuczony** .....
- b) **Wykonywany** .....

**13. Zawód matki** .....

**14. Zawód ojca** .....

**15. Sytuacja Pani/Pana rodziny w dzieciństwie (proszę zaznaczyć jedną odpowiedź):**

**Moja rodzina była...**

Zamożna	Raczej zamożna	Przeciętna, ani uboga, ani zamożna	Raczej uboga	Uboga
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**16. Ile wynosi Pani/Pana dochód miesięczny netto, 'na rękę' (proszę zaznaczyć jedną odpowiedź)?**

Poniżej 1500 zł	1500-2500 zł	2500-3500 zł	3500-5000 zł	Ponad 5000
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**17. Który z poniższych opisów najlepiej oddaje Pani/Pana sytuację finansową?**

- a) Mój dochód pozwala mi na zaspokojenie wszystkich podstawowych potrzeb (takich jak mieszkanie, wyżywienie, opłaty) i bez problemu starcza mi na inne wydatki, i przyjemności
- b) Mój dochód pozwala mi na zaspokojenie wszystkich podstawowych potrzeb (takich jak mieszkanie, wyżywienie, opłaty) i dodatkowo zostaje mi trochę na dodatkowe wydatki, i przyjemności
- c) Mój dochód pozwala mi na zaspokojenie wszystkich podstawowych potrzeb (takich jak mieszkanie, wyżywienie, opłaty) ale raczej nie zostaje mi na dodatkowe wydatki i przyjemności

- d) Mój dochód nie pozwala mi na zaspokojenie wszystkich podstawowych potrzeb (takich jak mieszkanie, wyżywienie, opłaty) i generalnie trudno jest mi związać koniec z końcem

**18. Czy jest Pani/Pan właścicielem mieszkania/domu (proszę zaznaczyć jedną odpowiedź)?**

- a) Tak  
b) Nie

**19. Czy kiedykolwiek wyjechała Pani/ wyjechał Pan z kraju w celach zarobkowych (proszę zaznaczyć jedną odpowiedź)?**

- a) Tak, raz na dłuższy okres (powyżej 6 miesięcy)  
b) Tak, kilka razy na dłuższy okres (powyżej 6 miesięcy)  
c) Tak, raz na krótki okres (do 6 miesięcy)  
d) Tak, kilka razy na krótki okres (do 6 miesięcy)  
e) Nie

**Jeśli spędziła Pani/spędził Pan dłuższy okres poza krajem w celu innym niż zarobkowy, proszę podać powód wyjazdu i krótko opisać jego okoliczności:**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**20. Czy zna Pani/Pan jakiś język obcy (proszę zaznaczyć jedną odpowiedź)?**

- | Tak, jeden               | Tak, dwa                 | Tak, więcej<br>niż dwa   | Nie                      |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**21. Jakie ma Pani/Pan hobby?**

.....  
.....

**22. Jak zazwyczaj spędza Pan/Pani urlop (proszę zaznaczyć jedną odpowiedź)?**

- | W kraju na wczasach<br>domu | Poza krajem na wczasach<br>znajomych | W kraju u rodziny/<br>znajomych | Poza krajem u rodziny/<br>znajomych | W domu                   |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/>    | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/>        | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**23. Jak często spędza Pani/Pan czas na poniższych zajęciach (proszę zaznaczyć odpowiednio)?**

	<b>Często</b>	<b>Czasami</b>	<b>Nigdy</b>
<b>Wyjścia:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Do galerii sztuki, na wystawy, lub do muzeów</li> <li>▪ Do opery, filharmonii bądź teatru</li> <li>▪ Do kina</li> <li>▪ Na koncerty (inne niż muzyki klasycznej)</li> <li>▪ Do klubów, barów, lub dyskotek</li> <li>▪ Do restauracji</li> </ul>			
<b>Uprawianie sportu</b>			
<b>Czytanie:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Czasopism i magazynów</li> <li>▪ Dzienników i tygodników</li> <li>▪ Literatury pięknej</li> <li>▪ Poezji</li> </ul>			

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Literatury faktu (np. historycznej, biograficznej, itp.)</li> </ul>			
<b>Zakupy (inne niż jedzenie i artykuły użytku codziennego)</b>			
<b>Oglądanie w telewizji:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Wiadomości</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Programów rozrywkowych</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Filmów</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Programów publicystycznych</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Programów dokumentalnych i oświatowych</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sportu</li> </ul>			
<b>Korzystanie z serwisów społecznościowych (np. Facebook, Twitter, itp.)</b>			
<b>Granie w gry video, bądź online</b>			

<b>Słuchanie muzyki:</b> ■ Popularnej (np. rock, pop, disco, techno, hip-hop)  ■ Kalsycznej  ■ Jazzowej			

**24. Czy jest Pani/Pan członkiem jakiejś organizacji, ugrupowania, bądź klubu?**

- a) Tak
- b) Nie

**Jeśli tak, to jakiej?** .....

**25. Na kogo głosowała Pani/ głosował Pan w ostatnich wyborach prezydenckich?**

.....

**26. Na którą partię głosowała Pani/ głosował Pan w ostatnich wyborach parlamentarnych?**

.....

**27. Czy uważa się Pani/Pan za osobę wierzącą (proszę zaznaczyć jedną odpowiedź)?**

Tak  
Nie

Raczej tak

Raczej nie

**28. Jak przejawia się Pani/Pana religijność z życia codziennym?**

.....

.....

.....

.....

**29. Które aspekty Pani/Pana wiary są dla Pani/Pana najważniejsze?**

.....

.....

.....



## Appendix 2: Information sheet

### Arkusz informacyjny badań nt. zmian społeczno-politycznych i debat o orientacji seksualnej we współczesnej Polsce

1. Cel badań: Zgromadzenie informacji na temat przemian społecznych, modernizacji, demokratyzacji i ich wpływu na debaty o orientacji seksualnej w Polsce, szczególnie na temat terapii reparatywnej i organizacji związanych z tą formą terapii, włącznie z grupami wsparcia, oraz opozycji wobec terapii reparatywnej w Polsce.

2. Osoba przeprowadzająca badania: Badania prowadzi Magdalena Mikulak, doktorantka w Londyńskiej Szkole Ekonomii i Nauk Politycznych (London School of Economics and Political Science).<sup>134</sup> Wszelkie pytania dotyczące badań należy kierować do osoby przeprowadzającej badania podczas spotkania, drogą mailową ([m.mikulak@lse.ac.uk](mailto:m.mikulak@lse.ac.uk)) lub telefoniczną pod numerem +48 537 773 866.

3. Osoba sprawująca nadzór nad badaniami: Badania są nadzorowane przez Dr Anię Płomień. Jeśli ma Pani/Pan jakiegokolwiek pytania dotyczące badań, na które nie uzyskała Pani/uzyskał Pan odpowiedzi od osoby prowadzącej, lub jeśli chce Pan/Pani zgłosić problem związany z badaniami, może Pani/Pan skontaktować się z Dr Anią Płomień drogą mailową ([a.plomien@lse.ac.uk](mailto:a.plomien@lse.ac.uk)) lub telefoniczną pod numerem +44 20 7955 7771.

4. Przebieg badań: Udział w badaniach polega na udzieleniu wywiadu, który potrwa około 1,5 godziny; w pierwszej części poproszę Panią/Pana o wypełnienie formularza: **Dane biograficzne uczestniczki/uczestnika**. Następnie zadam Pani/Panu szereg pytań na tematy związane z celem badań.

5. Zgoda na udział w badaniach: Udział w badaniach jest **całkowicie dobrowolny**. Poproszę o podpisanie arkusza potwierdzającego zgodę na udział w badaniach. W każdej chwili trwania wywiadu ma Pani/Pan prawo do wycofania się z udziału w badaniach, lub odmówić odpowiedzi na którekolwiek z pytań bez obowiązku uzasadnienia odmowy.

6. Anonimowość i poufność: Wszystkie informacje zdobyte w trakcie badań zostaną poddane anonimizacji oraz użycia pseudonimu. Ponadto, wszystkie dane osobowe zgromadzone w trakcie badań, będą traktowane jako poufne i nie zostaną udostępnione nikomu przed ich anonimizacją.

7. Zgoda na nagranie dźwiękowe: Aby mogła poświęcić Pani/Panu pełną uwagę, zamiast zapisywać to co Pani/Pan mówi, proszę o zgodę na nagranie dźwiękowe wywiadu. Nagranie zostanie rozpisane, zachowując Pani/Pana anonimowość, części nagrania zostaną przetłumaczone na język angielski.

8. Wyniki badań: Jeśli chciałaby Pani/chciałby Pan otrzymać podsumowanie rezultatów badań po ich zakończeniu (zaplanowane na pierwszą połowę 2017 roku) proszę o wypełnienie rubryki **Dostęp do wyników badań** w formularzu **Zgoda na udział w badaniach**.

9. Wszelkie dane uzyskane w trakcie badań będą przetwarzane i przechowywane zgodnie z prawem i z ustawą o ochronie danych osobowych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej.

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<sup>134</sup> Adres uczelni: LSE, Houghton Street, WC2A 2AE Londyn , Wielka Brytania.

### Appendix 3: Consent form

#### Zgoda na udział w badaniach: Zmiany społeczno-polityczne i debaty o orientacji seksualnej we współczesnej Polsce

Potwierdzam, że przeczytałem/przeczytałam i rozumiem informacje zawarte w **Arkuszu informacyjnym badań nt. zmian społeczno-politycznych i debat o orientacji seksualnej we współczesnej Polsce**, w tym że:

- udział w badaniach oznacza udział w wywiadzie prowadzonym przez Magdalenę Mikulak oraz wypełnienie formularza **Dane biograficzne uczestniczki/uczestnika**
- udział w badaniach jest dobrowolny:
  - mogę zrezygnować z udziału w każdej chwili, bez konieczności podania powodu rezygnacji
  - mogę odmówić odpowiedzi na poszczególne pytania zadawane w formularzu i w trakcie trwania grupy fokusowej, bez konieczności podania powodu odmowy
- mam możliwość zadania pytań na temat przeprowadzanych badań
- moje wypowiedzi będą uwzględnione w formie anonimowej (po polsku i w tłumaczeniu) w publikacjach, takich jak praca doktorska, książki, raporty, artykuły, strony internetowe i inne media, w celach naukowych
- moje dane osobowe podane w formularzu **Dane biograficzne uczestniczki/uczestnika** jak i omawiane w wywiadzie:
  - nie zostaną udostępnione nikomu w formie nieanonimowej
  - zostaną przetworzone w stosunku do innych informacji (np. ujęte w tabelach opisowych, lub w tekstach podkreślających szczególne aspekty badań, np. ‘mieszkaniec dużego miasta uważa że...’)

Wyrażam zgodę na udział w badaniach

Wyrażam zgodę na nagranie dźwiękowe wywiadu **pod warunkiem całkowitego skasowania pliku audio po rozpisaniu nagrania**

Imię i nazwisko

Podpis

Data

#### Dostęp do wyników badań

Jeśli chciałaby Pani/chciałby Pan otrzymać podsumowanie rezultatów badań po ich zakończeniu prosimy o podanie adresu email, bądź pocztowego, pod który możemy je przesłać:

.....

**Dziękujemy za współpracę i udział w badaniach!**

## Appendix 4: Call for participation

To whom it may concern,

My name is Magdalena Mikulak and I am a student at the London School of Economics and Political Science, where I am doing a PhD on the social changes, modernisation and their influence on the debates on sexuality in Poland. Part of my project is concerned with the issue of Reparative Therapy and the existence of support groups for people with 'unwanted same sex attraction'.

Having read your website in detail, and based on the information provided on the same, I am writing to you with an invitation to meet for an interview on the working, structure, aims, views, history and methods of your group. I am at your disposal from the 20<sup>th</sup> of June onwards and would gladly travel to one of the locations at which your group operates to get to know it better.

Should you have any questions regarding my study, feel free to email me. Should it be easier to discuss matters on the phone, I would kindly ask you to provide a phone number that I can call you on to answer any questions you might have.

Yours sincerely,

Magdalena Mikulak

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## Appendix 5: Published materials

### 1. RT groups' websites

- Ośrodek ODWAGA <http://www.odwaga.org.pl>
- Pascha <http://pascha.pl>
- Pomoc 2002 <http://www.pomoc2002.pl>

### 2. RT groups' webpages

- Odwaga, 2017. *Nasze podstawy*, retrieved on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2017 from <http://www.odwaga.org.pl/nasze-podstawy>
- Odwaga, 2017. *Publikacje: Przeczytaj – pomyśl – działaj!* retrieved on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2017 from <http://www.odwaga.org.pl/publikacje>
- Pascha, 2017. *Artykuły*, retrieved on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2017 from <http://pascha.pl/category/artyl/>
- Pascha, 2017. *Cel grupy*, retrieved on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2017 from <http://pascha.pl/cel-grupy/>
- Pascha, 2017. *Program działania*, retrieved on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2017 from <http://pascha.pl/program-dzialania/>
- Pascha, 2017. *Świadectwa i aktualności*, retrieved on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2017 from <http://pascha.pl/swiadectwa/>
- Pomoc 2002, 2017. *Czytelnia*, retrieved on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2017 from <http://www.pomoc2002.pl/czytelnia/>
- Pomoc 2002, 2017. *Statut stowarzyszenia POMOC 2002*, retrieved on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2017 from <http://www.pomoc2002.pl/o-nas/statut-stowarzyszenia-pomoc-2002/>
- Pomoc 2002, 2017. *Stowarzyszenie*, retrieved on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2017 from <http://www.pomoc2002.pl/o-nas/>
- Pomoc 2002, 2017. *Świadectwo Alana Medingera*, retrieved on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2017 from <http://www.pomoc2002.pl/swiadectwa/swiadectwo-alana-medingera/>

### 3. Testimonies

- Henryk, 2017. *Robię to dla mojego dziecka*, retrieved on 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2017 from: <http://www.odwaga.org.pl/refleksjeświadectwa>  
<http://www.pomoc2002.pl/swiadectwa/swiadectwo-jedrzeja/>
- Jędrsek, 2010. *Świadectwo Jędrzeja*, retrieved on 27th of June 2015 from:
- Kamila, 2017. *Ze śmierci do życia*, retrieved on 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2017 from: <http://www.odwaga.org.pl/refleksjeświadectwa>
- Maciek, 2015. *Świadectwo Maćka*, retrieved on 27th of June 2015 from: <http://www.pomoc2002.pl/swiadectwa/swiadectwo-macka/>
- Marek, 2015. *Świadectwo Marka II*, retrieved on 27th of June 2015 from: <http://www.pomoc2002.pl/swiadectwa/swiadectwo-marka-ii/>
- Matka, 2017. *Czekamy z nadzieją*, retrieved on 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2017 from: <http://www.odwaga.org.pl/refleksjeświadectwa>
- Miłosz, 2015. *Świadectwo Miłosza*, retrieved on 27th of June 2015 from: <http://www.pomoc2002.pl/swiadectwa/978-2/>
- Romek, 2013. *Grupa to nie wszystko. Bohaterstwo ludzi wiary*, retrieved on 27th of June 2015 from: <http://pascha.pl/grupa-to-nie-wszystko-bohaterstwo-ludzi-wiary/>

### 4. Other published materials

- Kampania Przeciw Homofobii, 2014. *Stanowisko psychologii w sprawie zmiany orientacji seksualnej*, retrieved on 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2014 from <http://www.kph.org.pl/en/allnews/15-kph/207-stanowisko-psychologii-w-sprawie-zmiany-orientacji-seksualnej> (this webpage has since been removed from KPH's website)
- Newsweek Polska (2014) *Jak kościół wypędzał ze mnie geja*, No. 8/2014
- Queer.pl (2013) *“Były” gej: terapia reparatywna nie działa*, retrieved on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 2016 from <http://queer.pl/tablica/193729/byly-gej-terapia-reparatywna-nie-dziala>

## Appendix 6: Map of Poland



Source: Google Maps, retrieved on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2017 from <https://www.google.es/maps/place/Poland/@51.1229034,20.1857929,6z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x47009964a4640bbb:0x97573ca49cc55ea!8m2!3d51.919438!4d19.145136?dcr=0>

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