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‘The purest citizens’ and ‘IVF children’. Reproductive citizenship in contemporary Poland[☆]

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Abstract This article examines the public debate on reproductive technologies in contemporary Poland, focusing on the rhetorical strategies used by the main opponents of IVF: conservative politicians representing the leading parties in the Polish parliament and the representatives of the Catholic Church. The analysis highlights the exclusionary logic inscribed in the construction of the main categories of political subjects in this debate, revealing important limitations of reproductive citizenship in the Polish context. The study draws on a variety of texts published in print and electronic media between 2007 and 2015, including articles on infertility and reproductive technologies published in the main Polish daily and weekly print publications, online resources (web pages, forums and Facebook pages), documents issued by the representatives of the Church, politicians and experts, e.g. open letters, commentaries, information for the media and interviews.

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KEYWORDS: fetal rights, IVF, Poland, political subjects, reproductive citizenship, reproductive technologies

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Introduction

This article examines public debate on reproductive technologies in contemporary Poland, mapping the dynamics of reproductive citizenship within a conservative social environment, characterized by a strong opposition to IVF and women's reproductive rights.¹ It focuses on the utterances of the opponents of assisted reproduction, including representatives of the Polish Catholic Church and politicians from two leading parties: the liberal-conservative Civic Platform (PO), which was in power between 2007–2015 and the right-wing populist Law and Justice (PiS), which won the election in October 2015.

It should be stressed that while this paper focuses on the ways in which citizenship is constructed by the opponents of reproductive technologies, these are not the only ways of constructing subjects and rights in this debate. For example, involuntary childless persons coalescing around the Association for Medical Treatment of Infertility and Supporting Adoptions 'Our Stork' attempt at influencing both public debate and regulations demanding their rights as patients and citizens to be secured by the state. Also, there are representatives of centre-liberal and left parties who stress that single women or homosexual couples should also have access to reproductive technologies, despite the fact that in their case the reason for infertility is social rather than medical. For an analysis of the discursive strategies of the proponents of assisted reproduction in Poland see [Korolczuk, 2015](#).

The analysis from this article sheds light on how the opponents of assisted reproduction (re)construct citizens and political subjects and how this process shapes reproductive citizenship in the country. It is demonstrated that, analogous to the debate on abortion focusing mostly on the fetus, whose rights effectively overshadow the rights of the woman who carries it, the discussion on reproductive technologies concentrates on the well-being of the embryo and fertilized eggs created in Petri dishes and stored in cryogenic tanks, rather than on women and men affected by infertility.² The opponents of IVF not only claim that the fertilized eggs are persons from the moment of fertilization, they also set apart zygotes or embryos, which have a low implantation potential as a minority group claiming that

they should be treated as disabled people, and enjoy full citizens' rights including the right to undisturbed development and fulfilment in life. At the same time, they construct a distinct category of 'IVF children' who appear as new political subjects but who are not poised to actualize their rights in a citizenship mode, because they allegedly pose a threat to the Polish nation as 'genetic others'.

Characteristics of these two categories of political subjects highlight the logic of exclusion inscribed in the ways in which reproductive citizenship is (re)constructed in the context of the debate on IVF in contemporary Poland. The controversies that reproductive technologies have stirred, and the arguments that have been used, demonstrate that this debate concerns more than diverging opinions on human reproduction and the use of biotechnologies. It also reflects fundamental differences in the understanding of the nature of citizens' rights, as well as different strategies of constructing political subjects. At stake are not only questions of demography, 'proper' reproduction, sexual difference and family, but also political subjecthood and democracy ([Holc, 2004](#); [Marchesi, 2012](#); [Metzler, 2007](#)).³

This article is based on a qualitative analysis of different types of texts which appeared between the years 2007–2015, including official documents, media releases, open letters and commentaries issued by the politicians representing the then ruling liberal conservative party PO, and populist right-wing party PiS (in power since autumn 2015), along with some smaller right-wing parties and the representatives of the Catholic Church in Poland.⁴ Additionally, material for analysis was gathered during parliamentary hearings and public debates organized by different groups, including the Association for Medical Treatment of Infertility and Supporting Adoptions 'Our Stork' (e.g. open debate which accompanied the presentation of the first Patients' Monitoring Report of Polish fertility clinics in October 2015). The aim was to reconstruct the way political subjects and citizens' rights are framed in this debate, with a specific focus on the logic of inclusion and exclusion of specific groups, and the relations of domination and subordination ([Fairclough and Duszak, 2008](#); [Van Dijk, 1997](#)). Thus, the following were examined: who is recognized as the subject; what kind of rights these subjects have and under what conditions they have full citizens' rights; and who is excluded, not given a voice and marginalized in this debate.

Reproductive technologies in the Polish context

Assisted conception by IVF has been practiced in Poland since the 1980s and by intracytoplasmic sperm injection

¹ The terms 'reproductive technologies' or 'assisted reproduction' are seldom used in the public debate in Poland. Most participants speak simply of 'in-vitro', which is why I use the phrases 'in-vitro fertilization' or 'IVF' as generic terms for reproductive technologies.

² In this analysis I use the term 'fertilized egg' somewhat interchangeably with 'embryo', although in humans a pregnancy is generally considered to be in the embryonic stage of development between the fifth and the eleventh weeks after fertilization ends. This choice of vocabulary aims at reflecting the terms used by the opponents of IVF, who prefer to speak of 'children' or 'humans', but if they use medical terms they most often choose the word 'zarodek'. The problem is that 'zarodek' refers to an early stage of human development generally; thus it can be translated in English both as the embryo and the fetus. I decided that the terms 'fertilized egg' and 'embryo' would be the most adequate translation, because the opponents of assisted reproduction insist that human life begins at the moment of conception, which is imagined as a particular point in time rather than a long-term process. Importantly, in the case of IVF this moment is supposed to happen when the egg is fertilized on the Petri dish, outside of the woman's body.

³ The analysis presented here focuses on subjecthood understood as subject position within a specific socio-political context, rather than subjectivity, which refers to psychologically generated processes of self-identification (cf. [Holc, 2004](#)).

⁴ The research leading to the results of this study has received funding from the Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies (grant 1555/42/2011 'We are no second-rate quality citizens. Negotiating 'biological' citizenship in social mobilizations around infertility issues and access to in vitro in Poland.'). The work on this article was also greatly assisted by another grant received from the Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies (grant A 78/2014 'Genus och politiska kunskapskulturer i Polen, Sverige och Tyskland').

(ICSI) since the 1990s. However, until very recently access to reproductive technologies was regulated mainly by the financial resources of the patients – the field of biomedicine has not been regulated by law. Thus, there is a lack of reliable statistics reporting what kind of procedures have been performed, and how many children have been born due to these medical interventions over the last three decades. Poland belongs to a group of countries where the proportion of clinics reporting to the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE) is limited. According to an ESHRE report published in 2010, of more than 38 (mostly privately-owned) Polish fertility clinics, 29 submitted information to ESHRE reporting 347 IVF cycles, 8621 ICSC cycles and 248 preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) procedures (ESHRE Report, 2014). As of 2015, there were 44 fertility clinics in Poland offering reproductive technology treatment, the vast majority of them privately owned (Krawczak and Damska, 2015), and until 2013 all patients had to pay privately for fertility treatments such as IVF or ICSI. In 2013 the Minister of Health introduced a programme of IVF reimbursement that was supposed to help boost fertility rates in Poland and to ensure the safety of embryos and patients in the absence of legislation regulating this sphere. The selected clinics taking part in the programme were obliged to report to the Minister and specific limitations regarding patients' age, health and family situation were introduced. The programme stipulated that the state would cover the expenses of up to three IVF cycles for women under the age of 40 who had already been treated for infertility for at least a year prior to joining the programme. It was intended to be sufficient for IVF procedures for 75,000 heterosexual couples (married or co-habiting) over the subsequent three years. As the reimbursement option turned out to be very popular, in 2015 the Ministry declared that the programme would be continued in 2016 for another 3 years. However, when the PiS party came to power in Autumn 2015, one of their first decisions was to cut the funds for the programme, which ceased to exist in January 2016.

The ending of the programme indicates that the struggle surrounding the regulation of access to reproductive technologies in Poland is far from over. Poland's coalition government, led by the PO, had been trying to pass legislation on this issue since 2007, but met with strong opposition voiced by the representatives of the Catholic Church, which in Poland is not only religious but also a 'semi-political organization' (Gozdecka, 2012:2; Just, 2008). The Church, supported by conservative and far-right parties, including the then oppositional PiS, managed to block the introduction of new regulations for several years. Since 2007 a number of different bills from all political parties were submitted to the parliament, including solutions which ranged from regulating reproductive technologies and offering state support for involuntarily childless couples to a complete ban on the procedure and imposing prison sentences for doctors performing IVF (Radkowska-Walkowicz, 2015).

Public debate on IVF has been extremely heated. In 2007, in the first open letter to politicians and the public issued by the Council of the Episcopate, IVF was referred to as 'sophisticated abortion' and prospective parents were accused of being 'wicked' and 'immoral' (Radkowska-Walkowicz, 2012). In 2010 the representatives of the Church threatened MPs who supported liberal regulations with excommunication,

to which a spokesman for the government answered that such 'threats and attempts to blackmail are amazing' but will not change the plans for regulating the issue (The Economist, 2013). This reaction did not stop the Church's officials from claiming that the protection of 'life from the moment of conception' is non-disputable and the parliament has no right to debate this issue. Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz expressed this view in a sermon delivered on 30 May 2013 in Kraków, where he said that the Catholic Church respects democracy but 'all should be faithful to truth and this includes the legislators. Truth cannot be established by voting. Thus, even the parliament cannot establish a different moral order than the one which is inscribed in people's hearts, in their conscience'.⁵ Such utterances prove that the Church opposes not only the use of reproductive technologies, but also democratic deliberation as the way to establish what should be allowed or banned in the sphere of reproduction in the country.

In June 2015 the Polish parliament finally passed the bill stipulating the conditions for the use of reproductive technologies. The law allows for the use of assisted reproduction only if medically justified, but it does not set a limit on the age of the women undergoing treatment. Anonymous gamete/embryo donation is allowed, as well as medically justified PGD, while experimenting on and/or selling of gametes and embryos, or destroying embryos that are 'fit for further development' are banned.⁶ The new law recognizes the rights of couples (married or cohabiting) to receive treatment on the condition that they have a documented history of infertility treatment for at least a year, which effectively restricts access to treatments for groups affected by social infertility, including single women and homosexual persons. While some experts claim that new regulations could be interpreted differently, since the law does not explicitly exclude these groups, this view was not shared by the Ministry of Health at the time the law was introduced. During the presentation of the report from patients' monitoring of IVF clinics in September 2015 the representative of the Legal Office of the Ministry of Health declared that 'our goal [when preparing the legislation] was to have couples make use of the new law, not single women' (authors' notes from the meeting). This statement shows that despite declarations that the rules governing reproductive technologies will guarantee access to these methods for all people who face the challenge of infertility, in practice they reinforce the normative dominance of heterosexuality and marriage as social relations.

The road to the introduction of new legislation has not been a smooth or easy process, and even today there is no political consensus around the question of whether procedures such as IVF should be allowed at all (Korolczuk, 2014a; Radkowska-Walkowicz, 2015). Given that many representatives of the ruling PiS oppose reproductive technologies in every shape and form, it is very likely that shutting down the reimbursement programme was just the first step on the road to banning reproductive technologies altogether.

⁵ http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114871,14010779,Kard_Dziwisz_Kosciol_ma_strzec_ladu_moralnego_opartego.html, last accessed 10.8.2015.

⁶ <http://legislacja.rcl.gov.pl/docs//2/230033/230036/230037/dokument119904.pdf>, last accessed 1.10.2015.

The nexus of reproduction and citizenship: feminist approaches

The politics of reproduction have always been one of the central issues for feminists and many feminist researchers have explored the nexus of (assisted) reproduction and citizenship in different socio-political contexts (Ginsburg and Rapp, 1995; Oleksy et al., 2011; Outshoorn et al., 2012; Richardson and Turner, 2001), not least in the post-socialist countries, including Poland (e.g. Gunnarsson-Payne and Korolczuk, 2016; Knecht et al., 2012; Knoll, 2012; Korolczuk, 2015; Kulawik, 2011). These efforts resulted in a flourishing of empirical research and theoretical inquiry focusing on 'the biological, sexual and technological realities of natality, and the social realities of the intimate intergenerational material and affective labour that is generative of citizens, and that serve to reproduce membership of, and belonging to, states, nations, societies' (Roseneil et al., 2013: 901). Feminist scholars have reinterpreted citizenship as embodied and gendered experience, stressing the importance of reproductive autonomy to women's full citizenship and highlighting that in many parts of the world the goal of securing full reproductive rights for women is far from achieved (Gal and Kligman, 2000; Lister, 2003; Mishtal, 2010).

Challenges to women's reproductive freedom are linked not only to political processes and socio-cultural trends, but also to the scientific developments challenging our ideas about what constitutes a human being, and questioning the very foundations of citizenship (Jasanoff, 2011; Kulawik, 2014). The first step towards gaining citizenship rights is the recognition of specific individuals and groups as citizens by the power-holders and the general public. Feminist scholars observed that with the development of modern life sciences, advances in the field of biotechnology and the growing medicalization of pregnancy, we witnessed the emergence of new subjects, such as 'fetuses' and 'embryos' whose rights are constructed as to override women's reproductive rights (Duden, 1993; Morgan and Michaels, 1999). Thus, an account of reproductive citizenship requires an analysis which is sensitive to the ways in which embryos and fetuses 'are constructed across boundaries of culture and nationality, and [which shows] how fetuses ... figure into reproductive rights debates in different parts of the world' (Morgan and Michaels, 1999: 2–3). This concerns not only the 'old' question of abortion, but also the 'new' debates on reproductive technologies, especially in countries such as Poland or Italy where the opposition to assisted reproduction is strong and supported by the powerful Catholic Church, where socio-political context is conducive to 'nationalizing the embryos', and where the embryos made in the laboratories cease 'to be the "private" objects of their parents' and become 'public "citizen subjects" and put under the guardianship of the state' (Metzler, 2007: 417; see also Marchesi, 2012). This process entails not only according legal recognition to fetuses (and liminal subjects such as fertilized eggs) but also treating them as a national good, as citizen-subjects who epitomize hopes and anxieties concerning the future of the nation. Within such a framework, narrowing the scope of reproductive citizenship of specific groups of women and men may appear as fully justified or even necessary.

In the Polish context 'fetuses' have already been attributed distinct political subjectivity in the debate on abortion in early 1990s, when the changing regulations in the field of human reproduction became an important part of the process of contestation, reconstitution and legitimization of political authority in the whole region (Graff, 2001; Holc, 2004; Zielińska, 2000). According to Gal and Kligman (2000: 15), the discursive and practical results of the debates on gender and reproduction 'provide one of the keys to understanding how politics is being reshaped in East Central Europe' (see also Fuszara, 2002). The recontextualization of the fetus – positioning it firmly in the public sphere rather than in the woman's body and making it into a citizen-subject has become a crucial part of this process.

Janine P Holc (2004) who interrogated the links between reproductive rights discourse and citizenship in Poland, shows that the discourse on abortion – 'abortion talk' – reflected in regulations concerning the termination of pregnancy in general, and the rulings of Constitutional Court in 1997 in particular, brought about a range of consequences which concern the categories of subjecthood and the shape of new democratic order in the country. According to Holc the ruling of the Court introduced a new category of 'fetal citizen' whose rights are recognized by the state. This 'fetal citizen' is constructed in a way as to occupy 'the category of "person" in a citizenship mode – it is poised to actualize its rights in a specific political context' (Holc, 2004: 757; see also Graff, 2001), and these rights overrule the rights of the pregnant woman to have control over her own body.

Consequently, the 'fetal citizen' became not only moral but also a legal and political subject whose (future) rights, including the right to 'undisturbed development' and achieving success in life, are guarded by the state, as it does yet not have the possibility to act on them. This notion of citizenship is constructed as oriented towards the future and being constantly under threat, mostly because of the instability of the process of democratization. Holc argues that while all liberal states need liberal citizens, the states which are 'transitioning' to democracy and liberalism need them most. Thus, 'fetal citizen emerges as the purest citizen' in contrast not only to women, but also other '(postnatal) subjects' such as 'Roma, black marketers and labor unionist (who) might be suspect in their commitments to capitalism, democratic procedures and the cultures of individualism' (Holc, 2004: 776–777).

Constructing the fetus as a privileged medical and legal subject blurs the difference between human beings and fetuses, thus challenging the constitutive categories of citizenship. In the debates on reproductive technologies in contemporary Poland we can also observe an attempt at blurring categorical differentiation between citizens and fertilized egg cells, which many countries consider as human tissue, which can be used for research purposes. I would argue that this is not only an effort to stretch the category of the citizen-subject even further (the next step being perhaps the recognition of the subjecthood of an egg cell or a sperm), it is also a strategy that allows one to expand on the category of the subjects who are imagined as 'others' and who are 'disavowed by the assertion of a fetal subject' (Holc, 2004: 757). While feminist scholars have shown that the emergence of the 'fetal person' effaces reproductive autonomy of women, in the Polish debates on reproductive

technologies there are also other groups of persons, whose citizen's rights are being undermined, such as the 'IVF children'. This latter category of political subjects refers to children born via IVF, which according to some of the opponents of reproductive technologies are fundamentally different, both physically and psychologically, from children who were conceived without medical intervention. Their alleged otherness or even monstrosity is presented as proof of the risk and unpredictability of the results of medical intervention in the sphere of reproduction, and justifies the view that reproductive technologies – just like abortion – pose a grave danger to the nation. The main difference is that while abortion is supposed to result in not producing enough Polish babies, assisted reproduction leads to producing 'monsters' (Radkowska-Walkowicz, 2012).

Fertilized eggs as 'the purest citizens'

Catholic priests, conservative politicians and experts in Poland routinely stress that their opposition to reproductive technologies is firmly rooted in the belief that the human life begins at conception and should be protected from this very 'moment'. The main argument here is that just as abortion should be banned to protect the fetuses, reproductive technologies should be outlawed in order to protect fertilized eggs and embryos, usually referred to as 'human life in the prenatal phase', 'conceived children' or 'children at embryonic stage' that are supposedly 'killed', or put 'into the gas chambers' by the doctors representing the interests of the global 'IVF industry'.⁷ Questions concerning how many spare embryos are actually kept in Polish clinics or whether cryopreservation is dangerous or beneficial to embryos are seldom discussed. The opponents of IVF – in this case Polish MPs – prefer to ask publicly 'whether live children can and should be frozen?' (Woźniak, 2012), confess that they 'hear the cry of despair of the tens of thousands of frozen embryos' (Gowin, 2009) or claim that the children of the parents who used IVF should be informed that 'in order for their brothers or sisters to be born after IVF, a few others had to die' (Rębek in Radkowska-Walkowicz, 2015: 195). The goal is not to debate facts but to instill in the audience the belief that embryos and even fertilized eggs are human beings and that they are in grave danger. Magdalena Radkowska-Walkowicz, a Polish scholar who analysed parliamentary debate on reproductive technologies in Poland, demonstrates that in this discussion embryos are presented not only as human beings but also as specific persons or children whose genetic code already defined, that 'it will be a tall girl with dark hair, slightly pert nose and a mole on her left cheek' (Radkowska-Walkowicz, 2015: 200). The identification of distinguishing characteristics makes them into individuals and helps to convince the public that at stake is the fate of citizens whose right to life and development is endangered.

⁷ Samples of this discourse are available in the media reports on the debate, both in mainstream media outlets and Catholic ones: http://episkopat.pl/dokumenty/pozostale/5194.1,About_Bioethical_Challenges_Facing_Catholics.html; http://czestochowa.gazeta.pl/czestochowa/1,48725,12716390,_Niechlubne_pierwszenstwo_mocny_glos_arcybiskupa.html, last accessed 10.9.2015.

The strategy to employ human rights discourse by conservative groups in the context of struggles over women's reproductive rights is not a novelty (Morgan and Michaels, 1999). This tendency can be observed in many different countries, for example in the US where anti-choice groups equate a fetus with a person employing the slogan 'No person is illegal' which was originally used by the left protesting against strict migration policies. What appears as specific to the Polish context is that the opponents of IVF create the analogy between embryos diagnosed with certain abnormalities or which do not develop well in the earliest, post-fertilization stages, and people who are discriminated against due to a disability. To this end PGD and freezing of embryos are compared with the eugenic politics of the Nazi era, and embryos not chosen for implantation are described as 'disabled people' who are denied the right to life and a chance to achieve success in their lives. During the public debate on bioethical issues in 2009, Jarosław Gowin (former Minister of Justice in the coalition government led by the Civic Platform and currently MP from a right-wing party United Poland) said:

What happens to the spare embryos? They go to the gas chambers! [*Idą do gazu!*] They freeze them. It should bring evident connotations to us all. It means, that the disabled, the sick and the weak are discriminated against, they are treated as second-rate people. (Krawczyk, 2009)⁸

Here, the modern semantics of human rights are employed to reshape the way in which persons are understood by authorities and the public. The embryo and even the fertilized egg appear as citizen-subjects whose rights – derived from loosely defined biological categories, such as 'weakness' meaning the low potential for growth and development, which is equated with potential disability – overcome the rights of people with infertility to have their own 'biological' children, or of patients to have access to medical treatment. Using the rhetoric of human rights allows the opponents of reproductive technologies to claim that their opposition is motivated by medical facts and human rights standards, and not religious beliefs. In the Polish context, the strategy to construct fertilized eggs and embryos as a minority group is an extension of the way fetuses have been attributed distinct political subjectivity since the start of the debates on abortion in early 1990s (Graff, 2001; Holc, 2004). As in the case of abortion, such construction of political subjecthood is highly exclusionary. The focus on the rights of 'pre-natal' citizens is not accompanied by concern for the rights of 'postnatal' citizens (Holc, 2004). Neither the claims of economically underprivileged single mothers who mobilized to protect the welfare provisions for their children during the last decade (Hryciuk and Korolczuk, 2013), nor the grassroots mobilization of parents fighting for social provisions for disabled children in 2013 (Kubicki, 2015), received a fraction of public attention that the 'endangered embryos' got. Clearly, within the contemporary post-transitional democratic order the most desired citizens are still the ones who cannot speak for themselves and are not able to challenge the authority of the state and the Catholic Church.

⁸ 'Kończą się prace nad rekomendacjami ws. ustawy bioetycznej' 04-03-2009 <http://www.rp.pl/artykul/271685.html>

The strategy of blurring of the boundaries between fertilized eggs (which in most countries are seen as human tissue) and fetuses (which are usually protected as they represent a stage of human development) has consequences for the dynamics of reproductive citizenship in Poland. As the citizens' rights are extended to eggs fertilized in a Petri dish and embryos placed in the cryonic tanks, the persons identified as those who pose the danger to these 'prenatal subjects' change as well. The latter no longer need protection against women, who are under constant suspicion and surveillance as those who can cause harm to the fetuses they carry (Morgan and Michaels, 1999). Here the real villains become doctors, experts, politicians, feminists and other proponents of assisted reproduction who allegedly represent the interests of a global 'IVF industry'. The phrase 'IVF industry' is routinely used by the Catholic media and Church officials to indicate that there is a powerful and well connected network of practitioners, clinic owners and decision makers promoting reproductive technologies worldwide, not only to make money, but to take control over human reproduction and destroy the 'natural gender order' and 'natural family' (Graff and Korolczuk, 2015).⁹

Within this framework medical intervention in human reproduction is equated with other 'unnatural' trends such as gender equality, homosexuality and reproductive rights, often dubbed simply as 'gender ideology' (Graff, 2014; Korolczuk, 2014b). The ways in which the opposition against IVF became intertwined with the war against 'gender ideology' in Poland, shows that the former is a facet of a broader conservative turn, which has emerged partly as a response to anxieties caused by recent developments in biotechnology and the fundamental changes they had caused in the sphere of kinship, reproduction and family, and partly by other socio-economic global trends. Within this context the use of reproductive technologies is viewed as yet another factor causing chaos in the sphere of human reproduction and challenging the nature-culture divide, which inevitably leads to undermining of the 'natural' gender order and the demise of Christian civilization.

'IVF children' as monsters

The Catholic dogma opposes the use of reproductive technologies on the basis that they are immoral, harmful to individual people and the whole society, but the Vatican stresses that persons affected with infertility should be treated with respect and compassion. Empathy and understanding are seldom heard in the utterances of the prominent representatives of the Polish Catholic Church, Catholic journalists and conservative politicians. They criticize involuntarily childless persons who decide to undergo such procedures as selfish and go so far as suggesting that such parents are murderers of 'children in the embryonic stage'. Many opponents of reproductive technologies also propagate the view that children born

following IVF are physically weaker, more prone to certain diseases, and often suffer from a range of psychical and emotional abnormalities (Dolińska, 2009; Radkowska-Walkowicz, 2012).

Such statements can be interpreted as an attempt at reversing the process of normalization of reproductive technologies and new kinship configurations, not only within the medical setting, but also in society at large. The fear of the 'monster' looming in the dark is stirred up to counteract the emotional power of the stories of 'miracle babies' and media images, featuring heterosexual, middle-class infertile couples achieving fulfilment and happiness thanks to medical interventions. But undermining the physical and mental health of children conceived with the use of reproductive technologies demonstrates that at stake are not only moral or religious values but national identity, interpreted in terms of blood, 'stock' and racial/ethnic purity. The myth of shared blood and genes usually constructs the most exclusionary visions of 'the nation' (Yuval-Davis, 1998: 21), which explains the tendency for othering and drawing demarcation lines between 'us' and unknown 'them'. Stigmatizing children born via medical intervention becomes justified when their otherness is constructed as a threat to the (imagined) community. In the context of Polish debate on reproductive technologies 'IVF children' are constructed as genetically different, carrying the stigma of their parents' and doctors' transgression of moral and natural laws. These children fall into the category of citizens, whose value is contested because of the alleged risks associated with their bodies, just like the children of migrants in Italy that emerge in some population discourses as a threat to the reproduction of the nation because of their racial and ethnic characteristics (Marchesi, 2012). Thus, even if the Polish opponents of reproductive technologies claim that they value the life and fate of embryos, nevertheless to avoid the danger of 'polluting' the healthy body of the nation it would be best if the involuntarily childless sacrifice their reproductive needs and desires and the 'IVF children' do not come into existence at all.

The notion of 'pollution' is of key importance here, because analogous to the debates on homosexuality, controversies around IVF brought about a resurgence of 'patterns of Poland's most ingrained discourse of exclusion, namely, anti-Semitism' (Graff, 2010: 591). As explained by Graff, in this context anti-Semitism should not be understood as a discourse targeting an existing religious or ethnic group, but rather 'a deep structure of irrational sentiment' based on fear and suspicion. These 'deep structures' are reflected in some striking analogies between the rhetorical strategies used in anti-IVF campaigns and the anti-Semitic discourse propagated by extreme right-wing circles (both of which are supported by the Catholic Church in Poland).

Just like Jews, the children born after IVF are dangerous because they represent the 'genetic other', weakening the body of the Polish nation, and endangering its well-being and survival. And comparable to Jews, they are most dangerous when their otherness can be concealed, making it difficult to set them apart from 'genuine' Poles – the greatest fear echoing in anti-Semitic propaganda is that Jews may easily blend in and corrupt the nation from inside, without even being detected. Such fears resonate in the publications concerning reproductive technologies which are presented as tools to alter children's genes and bodies in subtle and

⁹ Some samples of this discourses are available at: <http://www.naszdziennik.pl/mysl/86607,przemysl-smierci.html> and <http://www.fronda.pl/a/dlaczego-jestesmy-przeciwni-in-vitro,53742.html>, last accessed 10.9.2015.

imperceptible ways which may be difficult to identify once the child is born (Radkowska-Walkowicz, 2012).

This explains why it becomes so important to show that such children are not only genetically different from 'normal' children, but also visibly different (just as Jews are supposedly visibly different from non-Jews, e.g. have longer noses or differently shaped ears). The lists of deformities, which according to Catholic media 'IVF children' are supposed to suffer from, includes a range of physical abnormalities that makes them different at the first glance, such as 'obesity, short height, great height, deformed organs, drooling, trembling of the limbs, chewing movements, limited speech, dangling tongue' (Radkowska-Walkowicz, 2012: 33; see also Dolińska, 2009).

These examples show that although the campaign against reproductive technologies initiated and led by the Catholic Church is said to be motivated by a respect for human uniqueness and bodily integrity, it is based largely on undermining the value of the children born as a result of IVF, effacing their rights to equal and non-discriminatory treatment. This discursive strategy results in constructing clear distinctions between Polish embryos who are worthy of the state's protection and the others – the infertile and children born with the help of reproductive technologies – who are not.

Discussion

The opponents of medical intervention in the sphere of procreation constitute new categories of political subjects, some of which – embryos – are attributed full citizen status, while others – the so-called (monstrous) 'IVF children' – are imagined to pose a threat to the Polish nation, and thus become an object of public scrutiny and discrimination. The oppositional discourse which stigmatizes children born after medical intervention may appear extreme, but the logic of exclusion ingrained in this debate also affects other groups, shaping the ways in which reproductive citizenship is constructed and lived in the local context.

The introduction of new regulations and a reimbursement programme in Poland was presented by the then ruling PO party as a way to strengthen citizens' autonomy and help people to fulfill their dreams in the sphere of reproduction. In practice, however, the new law makes reproductive citizenship contingent upon being married or part of a 'stable' heterosexual relationship, as the state limits access to reproductive technologies for persons affected by social rather than medical infertility. All institutional actors taking part in the debate downplay the question of gender and other types of structural identities, such as class or sexuality, thus reproductive rights of specific groups such as homosexual couples and single women are effectively marginalized in the discourse, in law and in medical practice.

Religious discourse intertwined with nationalistic sentiments and the language of science becomes a powerful tool with which to discipline the public. In some respects, analogous to the 'gender talk' analysed by Agnieszka Graff in the Polish media during EU accession (2009), the debate on assisted reproduction became a debate on possible and desirable forms of belonging. The discourse on IVF propagated by the Church may be interpreted as another

case of 'displaced nationalism' (Graff, 2009), a narrative of the imaginary collective which envisions the possibility of re-establishing the 'natural' order of things not only in terms of gender roles, but also reproductive arrangements and family configurations. Since this collective is imagined as a homogenous nation rather than a pluralist society, the citizens are not only denied their rights in the field of reproduction, but also in terms of democratic deliberation over moral choices.

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