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**abstract:**

The text is devoted to the images used today by Polish pro-life (anti-abortion) movements and their interpretations by various social actors. The analysis focuses on the ways and frames of depiction, visual narratives and their relation to social practices. The anti-abortion visuals are divided into "hard" images of abortion and "soft" images of prenatal development and linked to various types of institutions and social actions. The author proposes a reflection on the power of particular types of images, understood as a measure of the strength of influence on the cognitive order and the order of social practices.

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# **Images as a Resource of Polish Pro-Life Movements**

## **I. Pro-life activism in Poland**

In this essay, I discuss a range of images used today by Polish “pro-life” (anti-abortion) movements, and explore the ways in which these images are interpreted by various social actors in the context of other messages and the practices in which they are immersed.<sup>1</sup> I focus primarily on the types and framing of images, the visual narratives they convey, and their connection to social practices; the medium itself – illustration, photograph, film, ultrasound, etc. – is of secondary importance. This article is an attempt to interpret several patterns I have observed in my research, and is not intended to be an exhaustive study of the subject. Rather, my aim is to reflect on the power of the imagery used by pro-life activists, that is, its impact on the cognitive regime and the regime of social practices – an effect exerted through techniques such as channeling attention, exposure, and obscuring. I intend to reveal the unexpected relationship between these two regimes: a rigid cognitive framework, after all, can produce the very practices that ultimately subvert it. The strengths and weakness of images are contextual; images are productive (and counterproductive) in ways that are not intended by their users.

The imagery used by pro-life organizations is widely accessible; thanks to the efforts of their activists, these images are widely distributed, and are even encountered by unwitting viewers. The basic research material, one could therefore say, is readily available, and can be preliminarily categorized by any viewer who cares to do so. However, my research was not limited to cataloging the images present in public space (on the street, online, and in printed media). Achieving a fuller understanding

of the context of this messaging required participatory experience. My first encounter with organizations that styled themselves as “defenders of life” took place amid a broader debate in Poland on the topics of gender, sexual education, and the treatment of infertility. In 2015, with the assistance of the National Organization for Women, I attended a training session for pro-life activists on staging outdoor exhibitions. From 2017 to 2020, I volunteered with a newly formed organization that provided help to women facing unplanned pregnancies under difficult life circumstances. I was the only non-religious person involved in the organization. Research was my main motivation for participating in the group’s efforts: I wanted to assess the potential of pro-life movements to fill gaps in existing support systems and help plan the development of alternative social policies.<sup>2</sup> My involvement in the group’s work gave me the opportunity to learn about the activities of other organizations with similar goals, including groups that organize retreats for women (and men) with experience of abortion.<sup>3</sup>

Due to the nature of my research and the need to protect the interests of the organizations and individuals involved, I have not named the groups in whose efforts I was directly involved. Instead, I discuss them in general terms and employ the technique of autoethnography. I mention certain names in my analysis of publicly available resources and when referring to a different type of experience: teacher training sessions, which I held in cooperation with pro-life, pro-choice, and other organizations for my university students. The activists with whom I worked distinguished between “soft” and “hard” pro-life groups – those that provided aid and those that fought to protect “a person’s right to live, beginning at conception,” respectively. Later in this essay, I use this emic classification to categorize social movements and the iconic resources they employ.

I wish to preface this discussion with an important observation regarding the language used below. When giving an account

of ideological disputes, there is a risk that one's choice of terminology will be interpreted as biased, signaling personal involvement or adoption of the source language. In this article, I make an effort to reconstruct the ideology of the pro-life movement, which necessitates the citation of its language. There are many passages in which I employ free indirect speech or – when its use would likely be misinterpreted – quotation marks. I realize that the use (and especially the abuse) of quotation marks can also be understood to indicate an opinion, which is why I would like to emphasize that, in this text, I do not use quotation marks to imply a position, but simply in the most literal way possible: to cite another person's words. As such, the quotation mark is also a means of directing attention, and, as Roch Sulima observes, it "metaphorizes – i.e. differentiates and translates – sequences of meaning."<sup>4</sup>

A thorough overview of the state of the field would exceed the scope of this essay; however, I will attempt to outline its boundaries and currents of thought, to the extent that they clarify the subsequent discussion. To begin, it should be noted that abortion, despite being a hot-button issue, is seldom the subject of scholarly inquiry. In her analysis of the fifty social science journals ranked highest by Scimago from 1996–2018, Inga Koralewska found that the topic of abortion was discussed in 0.33 percent of articles, the majority of which examined material sourced from English-speaking countries. The papers predominantly studied opinion polls, while women's abortion experiences were the least frequently discussed subject.<sup>5</sup> This is not entirely surprising, given that such testimonies are the most difficult to obtain and can usually only be researched through indirect means such as analysis of media (e.g. Internet forums) and studies conducted by social service organizations that provide help to women (in which case the experiences are subject to the preliminary interpretations of the activists involved). Also present in discussions of abortion is the subject

of imagery – usually fetal sonograms – and its impact on a woman's choice to have an abortion. It is worth noting that, contrary to the expectations of pro-life activists, these images do not have a predictable effect – they can reinforce a person's decision to go through with the procedure rather than dissuade them.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the meaning of the images can be negotiated in the course of an individual's dialogue with a specialist,<sup>7</sup> or only emerge from the confluence of various types of images, words, and emotions.<sup>8</sup> Numerous scholars confirm<sup>9</sup> that, irrespective of these findings, images have remained a key resource for pro-life organizations since the 1960s, allowing them to gain leverage over the pro-choice movement – which lacks equally compelling imagery of its own – by defining the “facts” and steering people's emotions. Some authors, among them Andrzej W. Nowak, even argue that, in the Polish context, a type of hegemony has been established, through public installations and myriad public-sphere depictions, of the “conceived child” as a visual “ontohegemonic object.”<sup>10</sup>

Pro-life organizations are studied even less frequently than abortion itself. Such research typically occurs in the context of social movement studies and, as Keith Cassidy argues, is often ideologically biased and dismissive of the divisions within the pro-life movement, which comprises organizations that are strictly anti-abortion groups, as well as ones that link abortion with broader issues of euthanasia, justice, and peace, whose ranks include people with left-wing views, and which occasionally cooperate, to a certain degree, with pro-choice organizations.<sup>11</sup> These observations pertain to the English-language literature, but reflect to some extent the character of the Polish discourse.

The history of pro-life movements in Poland can be reconstructed based on the few titles published by their activists (Fr. Dariusz Krawczyk, for example), as well the unique sociological study of social movements by Jerzy Drązkiewicz, *Świadectwo i pomoc. O ruchach antyaborcyjnych w Warszawie*

[*Testimony and Help: Anti-Abortion Movements in Warsaw*]. Fr. Krawczyk dates the beginnings of Polish campaigns to “preserve life” to the early 1960s (following the passing of a law in 1956 permitting the termination of pregnancies on social grounds). According to the author, the first social movement of this type, “Troska o życie” [Concern for Life], became active in the mid-1970s in Lublin, with further movements founded in Warsaw at the turn of the decade: “Gaudium Vitae,” “S.O.S.,” and Ruch Obrony Życia Dzieci Poczętych “Pro Familia” [the “Pro Familia” Movement for the Protection of Unborn Children].<sup>12</sup>

In the late 1980s, Jerzy Drązkiewicz conducted a study of three anti-abortion movements active in Warsaw, labeling them X, Y, and Z. In its footnotes, however, he mentions all of the groups listed by Fr. Krawczyk, along with Ruch Obrony Życia imienia księdza Jerzego Popiełuszki [the Father Jerzy Popiełuszko Movement for the Preservation of Life] and an organization called Straż Pokoleń [Guardians of the Generations].

Drązkiewicz’s analysis paints a picture of aid groups (assisting people and families facing the problem of unplanned pregnancy) with little awareness of earlier pro-life efforts in Poland; with time, the movement gradually diversifies into organizations that provide help and ones that conduct education campaigns, relying in part on foreign material, including visual aids such as the anti-abortion film *The Silent Scream*.<sup>13</sup> Dorota Sajewska has analyzed the film’s role<sup>14</sup> as the origin of Polish and international anti-abortion discourses. In her view, “post-abortion trauma” is a cultural construct created by the media, a necropolitical performance of power establishing the phantasm of the unborn child as a human agent, erasing women from the field of social visibility.<sup>15</sup>

The turn of the century saw the emergence of another organization, Fundacja Pro – Prawo do Życia [Pro – Right to Life Foundation]. As one of its activists recalled at an event for students of the University of Warsaw,<sup>16</sup> the foundation’s

beginnings came at a time when there was relatively little public support for an abortion ban, and pro-life messaging was dominated by non-radical organizations (which the activist described as “sympathetic” to the cause). Inspired by tactics employed in the United States, the foundation opted for a new approach: displaying images of aborted fetuses in public spaces. The organization’s members believed that presenting the “truth” about abortion would precipitate such a profound shift in public awareness that terminating a pregnancy would become unthinkable. This change in awareness was to be accompanied by changes in legislation – namely a complete ban on abortion. The exhibition *Wybierz życie* [*Choose Life*], displayed on Polish streets since 2005, provoked strong public reactions and monopolized the connotative field of the term “pro-life”: anti-abortion activism in Poland is currently associated primarily with the efforts of radical groups active in the legal and symbolic spheres.<sup>17</sup> The dynamic within the field of pro-life movements was thus again reversed: the new (“soft”) aid organizations that emerged in the twenty-first century (particularly after 2010) saw themselves as alternatives to the dominant “hard” model, whose adherents waged a ruthless campaign for changes in the law and public perception by juxtaposing women (families) facing difficult life circumstances with their children (who were “at risk of abortion”). The appearance of these types of groups and the shift in the nature of pro-life activism (toward more complex models) was noted in feminist literature.<sup>18</sup>

My own experiences in the field have shown that contemporary “soft” pro-life aid organizations are local grassroots initiatives that form independently of one another, are often unaware of similar movements, past and present, and eventually come into contact with one another and occasionally establish partnerships – typically in the form of loose networks, without attempting to build centralized systems. Secular

organizations are absent among pro-life aid movements; even groups that profess to be non-denominational are largely made up of individuals who are primarily motivated by their faith and who take advantage of church resources – both material and emotional-symbolic. Aid movements typically form at the diocese level, inspired by pastors or congregations (intensely religious communities) and promoted by Catholic media. Interestingly, evangelical movements are also very active, leveraging their nationwide network of churches to efficiently organize local aid. Examples of such organizations include the “Nie jesteś sama” [You’re Not Alone] Mission, based in Warsaw, and Kobietom na Pomoc [Aiding Women], in the Tri-City.

Among Catholic aid organizations, the best known is Fundacja Małych Stópek [Tiny Feet Foundation], headed by Fr. Tomasz Kancelarczyk in Szczecin. The foundation frequently works as a hub connecting other groups: it plays a significant networking role, in part due to its effectiveness in raising and distributing money. Other groups active at the national level include Grupa Kananejka [“Canaanite Woman” Group], the Javani Foundation, Stowarzyszenie Dwie Kreski [Two Lines Association], and Fundacja Bezcenni [Priceless Foundation]. These types of groups usually provide crisis hotlines and email counseling, and offer local help “tailored to an individual’s needs.” This help is provided – mostly, but not exclusively – to women with unplanned pregnancies, and pro-life efforts are sometimes accompanied by other services, such as family care, child welfare, and fertility counseling. The hotline/email/chatlines are also used by women who have experienced an unwanted abortion or who face a moral dilemma after terminating a pregnancy.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the tensions between “hard” and “soft” pro-life movements (different strategies), in practice individual organizations and people can combine both forms of activism and regard them as complementary. However, not everyone

agrees with this approach, and one of the bones of contention is the use of images. What is at stake, in this case, is more than just the choice between different visual representations of worldviews: it is about shaping public opinion and practices. "He who visualizes badly loses the encounter; his fact does not hold," writes Bruno Latour.<sup>20</sup> This is especially true when the phenomenon in question is not visible to the naked eye. What matters, therefore, is what will be made publicly visible, to whom and by whom, through images, inscriptions, and social power dynamics.

## II. "Hard" and "soft" images

### 1. "Hard" images

Fundacja Pro has opted to exclusively use "hard" messaging in its visual communications: the exhibition *Wybierz życie*, displayed in urban spaces (often at parishes and hospitals or as mobile images on vans), comprises 24 posters<sup>21</sup> depicting parts of dead fetuses at various stages of prenatal development. The fetuses are presented in a manner that illustrates the brutality of the violence to which they are subjected and emphasizes the similarity between a fetus and an infant. A frequently used rhetorical trick is the juxtaposition of these pictures with images of other practices that are regarded (universally or by specific groups) as unacceptable: genocide, slavery, euthanasia, in vitro fertilization, and animal abuse. Accompanying the images are captions that explain what they depict (e.g. "body of a child killed at 24 weeks of age") and how they are to be interpreted (e.g. "slaughter of innocent children").

The foundation draws on the experience and visual resources of the American organization Priests for Life, eschewing positive messages such as images of fetal development in favor of negative messaging, i.e. the “truth about abortion.” One of its posters aptly describes the aim of the exhibition. The caption on a display panel bearing images of two differently sized dead fetuses reads: “You can look away, but you can no longer say you don’t know what abortion is.” The foundation addresses the effectiveness of these types of efforts on their website: “The display of the exhibition in numerous cities across Poland has led to a radical shift in public opinion on matters concerning human life. Since 2013 we have held over 300 exhibitions, each of which averaged several thousand viewers, thanks to its location and duration. This means that the truth about abortion has reached millions of Poles. Thanks to our campaign, many Poles, especially young people, now support a complete ban on the killing of unborn children.”<sup>22</sup>

The foundation’s aim is to change social mores and achieve a complete ban on abortion; it views other “pro-life” efforts – displaying positive images, providing aid to women – as less effective or irrelevant. Its activists maintain that deontological matters should be the organization’s sole objective. The American Catholic apologist Trent Horn recommends a similar approach, arguing that “if pro-lifers start arguing about poverty, or the Constitution, or sex education, or contraception, or any other irrelevant issue, they will lose.”<sup>23</sup> But when it comes to matters of strategy, Horn is less radical in his choices: he believes that conversations and a friendly attitude are crucial to convincing one’s audience, and pictures are only there to reinforce the arguments: “I don’t believe the pro-life movement



Graphics of Fundacja Pro – Prawo do

Życia, source:

<https://stronazycia.pl/fundacja/wystawy/>;

<https://www.facebook.com/FundacjaPro/>

can win without using images of any kind.”<sup>24</sup> Despite his professed sympathy for aid efforts, Horn remains focused on the fundamental issue: “It is not to save as many human lives as possible; it’s to secure the right to life for all human beings.”<sup>25</sup> The image, in his view, is an important resource that helps establish what is to be perceived as “objective,” free from technological intermediation; it is assumed to give immediate access to the truth.<sup>26</sup> The Pro-Life Alliance, a British organization that employs tactics similar to those of Fundacja Pro, equates in one article “the right to see inside the womb” with “the right to make an informed choice.”<sup>27</sup> The right to see applies not only to prenatal images of wanted children, but also to unjustifiable images that provoke emotional responses which only confirm their authenticity.<sup>28</sup> Here, seeing and knowing are conflated: seeing and having an opinion about what one has seen is not only a right, as Julie Palmer notes, but the duty of a conscious citizen.<sup>29</sup>

The Pro-Life Alliance prefers “hard” images of abortions to “soft” images of prenatal development, which it sees as being more susceptible to verbal subversion.

“The essential characteristic of powerful images is their troublesomeness,” Marek Krajewski argues.<sup>30</sup> Troublesomeness and power can take on different forms: Fundacja Pro strives to exert influence through scandalization, visual exaggeration,<sup>31</sup> and spatial excess. Here, the refusal to look is an (invariably futile) attempt to deny facts, but also confirms the power of the images. The foundation’s exhibitions have been the subject of numerous court cases and attempts to prohibit their display in urban spaces: accusations formulated in legal terms cited the distasteful stunt of displaying bloodied cadavers, excess, and the need to protect minors.<sup>32</sup> Other arguments challenged the manipulative content of the images: the fetuses were in fact older than they were claimed to be,<sup>33</sup> and the procedures depicted in the posters were a far cry from the now-common pharmacological abortion, usually conducted at home, typically

within the first few weeks of pregnancy.<sup>34</sup>

In response to accusations that the exhibition was harmful to minors, Fundacja Pro commissioned a psychological expert opinion. The opinion, prepared in 2006 by therapist Beata Rusiecka – still available on the organization’s website – dismisses these allegations.<sup>35</sup> She argues that, because of their inability to think in abstract terms, younger children are incapable of interpreting images correctly, and instead rely on statements made by adults. Anxious responses could only be elicited in children who associated the images with their own experiences of neglect, and that was the responsibility of their guardians, not the foundation that organized the exhibition. Older children might become more inquisitive, and may experience anxiety when they discover that their guardians have hidden the truth about abortion from them. Adolescents may associate sexuality with death (the opinion does not explicitly state whether this is a favorable outcome). Adults and minors alike may experience disgust, which is beneficial: their aversion to a dead body initiates the grieving process. Anger, fear, and other negative emotions resulting from viewing the exhibition, Rusiecka argues, are associated with denial. Accepting the difficult truth about abortion leads to healing, especially for those who have been affected by the experience of abortion, or (as she implies) “post-abortion syndrome” or “survivor syndrome.”<sup>36</sup>

The opinion aptly illustrates the relationship between the visual resources of the “hard” pro-life movement and efforts to medicalize the experience of abortion in faith-based psychotherapy. The “objective” truth of the image is just as indisputable as the “objective” truth of the suffering that follows abortion. The image cannot be disputed even when it is cropped, exaggerated, or inaccurate, as these are all secondary details that merely amplify, rather than challenge, the message underlying the photo. Refusing to look, denial, and indifference are seen as defensive responses that only confirm the truth. In

the extensive Christian therapeutic literature, “post-abortion syndrome” – a physical and mental reaction to the trauma of abortion – is treated almost as an inevitability,<sup>37</sup> albeit one that occurs at various later stages in the lives of women (and sometimes men). Menopausal women, Christian therapists maintain, are particularly at risk of experiencing a crisis linked to a past abortion. The syndrome can also allegedly emerge shortly before death, that is, in moments of reflection about missed opportunities, symbolized by the terminated pregnancy. From the perspective of this interpretation, post-abortion syndrome is indisputable because the likelihood of its occurrence increases (instead of decreasing) with the passage of time, and every mental breakdown or crisis can be interpreted as a consequence of the abortion experience.

A sociological and anthropological reflection on the construction of post-abortion syndrome, I believe, should distinguish between three types of regret. One may experience regret due to an abortion without regretting the decision to go through with it. As research by Ewelina Wejbert-Wąsiewicz shows,<sup>38</sup> regret over the decision typically occurs when the choice to terminate a pregnancy was made under duress, rather than of the woman’s own free will. The third type of regret is of a religious nature, and is linked to a system of doctrinal beliefs and ritual means of expression. It can be fueled by regret of a metaphysical nature, related to unrealized potential and lives not lived; it achieves its full power, however, in combination with regret of the second type – regretting a decision that was not fully autonomous.<sup>39</sup>

“Survivor syndrome” – the guilt experienced by someone who has survived a traumatic event – is the term Christian psychotherapists apply to the experience of children raised in families in which an abortion has occurred, especially if it was a family secret or involved unexpressed regret. In this view, abortion is seen as also questioning the value of the children

that were born but could just as easily have been “slaughtered”; it prevents the building of good intergenerational ties and a sense of self-esteem. The first step is therefore to “stand in truth”: to admit that the abortion happened and that it was wrong, that it was the “murder of an innocent child.”

Visualization – along with the definition of facts, expression of regret, consolation, and the use of narrative schemas – plays a crucial role in the psychotherapy process. The visual imagination helps Christian therapists guide a person through the grieving process when there are no visual memories to draw upon. Imagining the child and one’s interactions with it, defining its gender, and naming it are all measures intended to help the patient say goodbye. Women are sometimes asked to summon from memory the details of the abortion, and then proceed to images of the reconstituted child in its afterlife.<sup>40</sup>

The “hard” image of an abortion (recalling memories, learning about the particulars of the procedure, conjuring visual fantasies associated with the experience) is therefore the first step toward “soft” visual representation that constitute figurations of regret. Christian therapy regards as particularly painful the uncertainty of existence, a situation that arises, for example, following the use of emergency contraception: the potentially “murdered child” can then haunt the woman as an apparition.<sup>41</sup>

The “child-oriented” therapeutic method<sup>42</sup> offers a path to solace: substitute objects (e.g. toys, clothing) help give the child a face, and the symbolic burial of an object allows the person to say goodbye. The success of this type of therapy is predicated on the woman assuming the role of the mother of the dead child, and forgiving herself and others who bear the previously articulated guilt. Women who have happily completed the therapy are sometimes described as having regained the ability to look at themselves in the mirror, and become active in the pro-life movement.

The retreats I attended for women who have experienced abortion mostly followed this scenario, allowing religious women to symbolically affirm the deontological and social order, and reclaim their places within it after a brief, extended, or more prolonged deviation, which is interpreted as a sign of weakness, sin, and trauma.<sup>43</sup> In Christian psychotherapy, free will and the pursuit of desires are depicted as having detrimental consequences (unless they involve choosing specific, predetermined paths in life). Its adherents challenge the notion of “wanted children,” pointing out that every child has the right to “be accepted” by the parent. Retreats thus serve as a means of reinforcing this cognitive framing without disciplining women – on the contrary, it gives them permission to stray from the established order with the intention of returning and regretting a life that, for one reason or another, they could not sustain.

These types of mourning scenarios, aided with affirmative but painful visualization, are also employed by perinatal hospices, which provide comprehensive support to families with unfavorable prenatal diagnoses, and are presented in the religious discourse as alternatives to abortion. The decision to give birth to a child with serious and untreatable abnormalities is, in most cases, religiously motivated and has been co-opted by religious narratives, which are disseminated through websites and booklets published by such hospices.<sup>44</sup> The only choice, essentially, is to accept one’s fate. This decision has the advantage of allowing the person to properly mourn the death of the child: to cherish every life, and to take time to say goodbye. Mourning often begins in the prenatal stage, during pregnancy, and culminates in the experience of the physical encounter with the newborn child, brief as it may be. The moment is preserved in photographs, films, and artifacts. A lack of visual documentation would impede the mourning process and leave the person unable to make sense of this unique form of parenthood. Perinatal hospices offer post-partum photo

sessions, which become (along with the baptism) the main event of the child's life – sometimes only a few hours – and the focal point of future memories. In order to “accept the child,” the parents must free themselves from “perfect fetus syndrome.”<sup>45</sup> In this context, prenatal tests serve to establish the fetus as a patient – curable or terminally ill. The prenatal images aid adjustment to the reality of the illness, while the post-partum photo session testifies to the goodness of the flawed infant's short life. Again – as in the case of “hard” images – to avert our eyes from what we fear or do not wish to see would be to deny the value of human life.

The following is an example of a typical testimony offered by a woman in the care of a perinatal hospice who had previously experienced a miscarriage: “I prayed for Mieszko to be born alive. I wanted [his] grandparents and our siblings to meet him; I wanted him to be baptized, to feel the love we had for him, to meet us. To me, nothing is worse than not being able to say goodbye. I'd been through it twice. I didn't get to see my children, I couldn't say goodbye, and I never found out what happened to them. This time I wanted Mieszko to have a dignified birth and a dignified death. [...] Thanks to the photos, I remember what happened that day. It's a good thing the photographer was there, otherwise I wouldn't remember any of the emotions I felt. [...] Thank you, God, for this miracle. You answered my prayers. Mieszko was with me. I got to meet him, and he got to meet me. Our immediate family got to meet him. He was baptized. [...] I kissed him and said goodbye. [...] I would never have made any other choice.”<sup>46</sup>

“Hard” abortion imagery reinforces the cognitive frame in which “abortion is the murder of an innocent person” and “abortion is trauma,” which in turn creates an opening for a number of therapeutic institutions. These institutions satisfy important social needs; however, due to the religious narratives they (or the entities that promote them) have adopted, their

reach and consolation effectiveness are limited.

Abortion imagery is designed by its creators to mainly target activists, radicalizing their views and spurring them to act. At a training event I attended for hard pro-lifers, the trainer stated as much in explicit terms, sharing his own experience: when he joined the group, he still considered abortion permissible under certain circumstances, but as he became more active in the movement, even those exceptions became unthinkable to him.<sup>47</sup>

“Hard” abortion images are therefore intended to have a predominantly reflexive impact within the boundaries of a particular religious ideology. This is a consequence of the adopted communication strategies, and the collocation of these messages with others that are even more tightly linked to doctrinal convictions.<sup>48</sup>

## 2. “Soft” images

The point of departure for the discussion above was the expert opinion of Beata Rusiecka on the impact of the exhibition *Wybierz życie*. According to the expert commissioned by Fundacja Pro, powerful “hard” pro-life imagery can trigger a moral and therapeutic process that ultimately leads to the affirmation of life and the rebuilding of social bonds frayed by abortion. By compelling the viewer to perform emotional labor, it is argued, “hard” images serve a disciplinary function.<sup>49</sup>

Not all pro-life activists and theorists share this opinion. There is substantial resistance to the use of hard images; groups that have expressed their skepticism include practitioners of prenatal psychology in Poland, who grant agency to fetuses, perceiving them as active, conscious beings. Among them is Zofia Kończewska-Murdzek, author of the significantly titled analysis *Afirmacja dziecka w łonie matki – podstawą cywilizacji miłości* [*Affirmation of the Child in the Mother’s Womb: The Basis of the Civilization of Love*], based on her research from the 1980s.<sup>50</sup>

I am only interested in the results of the author's study as an expression of her ideological convictions (her work was brought to my attention by pro-life activists); I make no judgment of the methodology of her research or its evidential value. The study was conducted on a sample of early-year university students divided into three groups: the first was shown a film about abortion, the second viewed a film about prenatal development, with realistic footage of childbirth, and the third group watched a film about prenatal development with no childbirth scenes. Before and after the screening, participants were asked to perform a Family Drawing Test and an A-B-P association test (animal-bird-plant, created for the purpose of the study), and answer the question, "Which plant or animal do you associate with a child in a mother's womb?" The study revealed that while the screening of the film about abortion enforced anti-abortion attitudes, it also triggered negative emotions, which were then associated with the conceived child. This stance, the author argues, could result in an unwillingness to procreate. The drawings made by students who had viewed the film about abortion demonstrated increased levels of aggression and a deterioration of the child's position in the family: in the association test, for example, participants gave the names of plants that are usually destroyed as weeds. The best results were achieved in the third group, which watched the film about prenatal development without realistic footage of childbirth. In this group, anxiety levels were the lowest, and the participants' attention was drawn to the child's welfare rather than the threats to its life. The results of the study led the author to the conclusion that it was necessary to uncouple the association between unborn children and abortion, and especially to avoid connecting discussions of prenatal development with the issue of abortion. The latter subject, Kończewska-Murdzek argues, should only be addressed verbally, and images should only be used in encounters with people who

trivialize the problem.

Many pro-life organizations employ this strategy, combining the affirmation of prenatal development with aid-oriented activism. The most active group in both of these areas is Fundacja Małych Stópek, which is extraordinarily effective in providing help and educating people about prenatal development using traditional and modern means of communication. <sup>51</sup>

The foundation stages exhibitions with a positive message, distributes plastic figurines representing a fetus in the tenth week of gestation, and visualizes prenatal development with the help of playing cards, spiritual adoption prayer apps for mobile devices, and booklets enhanced with augmented reality functions. All of these efforts are designed to engage with young audiences using their language and technology. One of the foundation's most recent publications, a booklet titled *Genesis. Początek życia człowieka* [*Genesis: The Beginning of Human Life*] complements their mobile app Genesis AR+. Users can point their smartphones at illustrations in the booklet to view a short animated clip in which a fetus grows, levitates in space, and makes subtle hand movements. The image is shaky, but with a modicum of patience the viewer can observe the fetus from various angles, and even peek inside it by moving the device toward the image, revealing bits of the skeletal and circulatory systems, including a beating heart. The booklet's text consists of dry biological copy; together,



Graphics of Fundacja Małych Stópek: leaflets and cards enabling viewing the development of the fetus in three dimensions, source: <https://www.facebook.com/FundacjaMalychStopek>; <https://wiedzaozycie.info/rozszerza-rzeczywistosc/>

the writing and the reduplicated images testify to the idea of “humanity from the beginning,” which includes forms that do not visually resemble a human being. Here, the object of affirmation is the life process, which begins before fertilization: the first illustration depicts an ovum ringed by spermatozoa.

The visuals published by Fundacja Małych Stópek supplied the bulk of the material Andrzej W. Nowak used in his deliberations on the “conceived child” as an easily installed ontohegemonic object (due to the ease of its visualization). An embodiment of the empty signifier, the ontohegemonic object is a means of discursively colonizing the future and facilitating the creation of effective chains of equivalence (linking anti-abortionism with other conservative ideas).<sup>52</sup> The conceived child achieves hegemony not only through repeated reduplication and visual excess, but also, I would argue, through enlargement and division into self-autonomizing elements, particularly ones that carry symbolic meaning: “tiny hands,” “tiny feet,” a “beating heart” (living but fragile body parts that invoke the dismembered hands and feet of aborted fetuses). An unexpected and – from the pro-lifers’ standpoint – likely undesired chain of equivalence can be observed between soft pro-life images and the pictures used by in vitro fertilization clinics: partial and complete images of infant bodies, the defense of life from the moments preceding fertilization, and films depicting fertilization as part of a family’s history.

“Soft” fetal images perhaps have even greater potential to establish an incontestable cognitive regime than images of abortion do. They are, in this sense, powerful images. Their subtext speaks to the same deontological regime in which the force of life is understood as affirmatively submitting to one’s fate, inevitably leading to the overcoming of death (if only symbolically). Yet soft images do not violate any cultural taboos, which allows them to appear in broader contexts: the *Genesis* booklet, for example, is categorized as educational material

for use in schools.

But does the establishment of hegemony coincide with the formation of positive associations with “conceived life,” as Zofia Kończewska-Murdzek claims? The story behind a billboard campaign launched by Fundacja “Nasze Dzieci” [“Our Children” Foundation] to increase public awareness of perinatal hospices provides material for an analysis of this question.

The pro-life organizations I worked with always strove to reach as many women as possible with their message, through various communication channels. They dreamed of carrying out a media campaign that would tell “every woman in Poland” about “the alternatives to abortion.” The campaign organized by Fundacja “Nasze Dzieci” appears to be the fulfillment of that dream: with the financial support of a wealthy businessman, posters featuring artwork by Ekaterina Glazkova, depicting a fully developed child in a heart-shaped womb, appeared in many cities across Poland. Initially uncaptioned, the posters were eventually inscribed: “Perinatal hospices” or “I’m dependent, I trust you.” Other posters were also put up, featuring a close-up of the fetus’s face with the words, “I’m five months old,” and a close-up of its tiny feet (at an enormous scale) with the caption: “I’m eleven weeks old.” As a result of their ubiquitous presence in urban spaces – on billboards, public transport stops, and buses – the posters sparked intense but frequently hostile reactions. The campaign coincided with the ramping up of the abortion debate in Poland, whose Constitutional Court had ruled in 2020 that terminations for fetal abnormalities were illegal. Because of the timing, the posters were interpreted, in the context of the country’s culture wars, as an effort to curtail the reproductive rights of women



Graphics of Fundacja “Nasze Dzieci”: Ekaterina Glazkova’s work on everyday objects available in the Foundation’s online store, source: <https://www.fundacjakornice.pl/pl/promuj>

(an allegation that has also been leveled at the *Genesis* booklet). In the social climate of the time, it would have been difficult to interpret the message in any other way, especially given the use of the pro-life movement's stock rhetorical devices in the campaign's visual and verbal layers. Another notable feature of visual ontohegemony present in the foundation's campaign is the use of illusory subjectification to impose a voice. The fetus is the ideal object for this technique: voiceless by nature, it can be ventriloquized by another person, who stands up for the fetus's supposed interests by speaking on its behalf ("I'm," "I trust"). This voice resounds, silencing other voices as it cannot be engaged in dialogue. Another, even more interesting, example of this type of technique is "Głos Nienarodzonych" [the "Voice of the Unborn"], a bell installed in urban spaces by Fundacja "Życiu Tak" ["Yes to Life" Foundation]. Passersby are invited to "speak" on behalf of the unborn by ringing the bell, which bears a molding of a fetal sonogram guarded by two cherubim.

The posters met with widespread acts of resistance and aggression. They were defaced with subversive pro-choice messages, and attempts were made to protest the campaign's presence on public transport vehicles. The images were accused of falsehood (a healthy fetus illustrates the message about perinatal hospices) and emotional manipulation. Critics bemoaned its excessive public presence and wastefulness – some even calculated how much public aid could have been provided for the cost of such a sweeping ad campaign.<sup>53</sup> The immense numbers (of posters and millions of złoty spent) were interpreted as a manifestation of dominance, an attempt to co-opt public space with an ideology whose provenance was blatantly religious. Ekaterina Glazkova herself released a statement denouncing the use of her artwork (which the foundation purchased from a stock image website). Not all perinatal hospices saw the campaign as beneficial to their interests; they took issue with the communication strategy,

finding that the actual message was revealed too late and was too vague.<sup>54</sup>

The use of ontohegemonic practices to construct soft messages does not appear to achieve the effect of building positive associations in the minds of the public. Instead it installs a visual object that is perceived as violent, obtrusive, emotionally manipulative, and unmoored from specifics (fetal abnormalities, recommended action). Undoubtedly, the reception of the images is different in pro-life circles. However, their members are likely to be aware of the existence of perinatal hospices, while those who aren't might not draw a connection between the healthy fetus and the somewhat cryptic caption with their own need to take a stance vis-à-vis an unfavorable prenatal diagnosis.

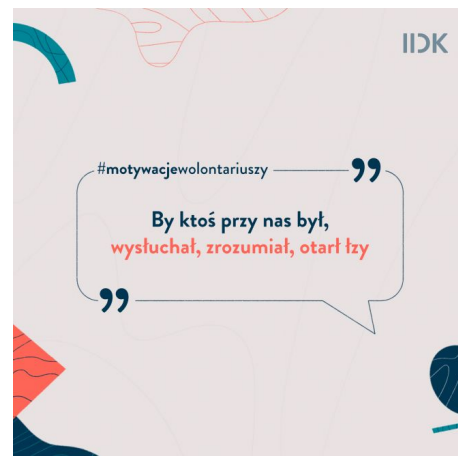
Nevertheless, the campaign carried out by Fundacja "Nasze Dzieci" paved the way for further actions outside the visual realm, and in this sense the posters and the responses they elicited proved to be socially productive. The foundation launched a hotline for people in difficult life circumstances. As its coordinator explains, "We want to start by mainly helping pregnant women facing difficulties in life, whether they're family problems, financial issues, or professional challenges. We're also going to offer our help to men and women whose unborn children have been diagnosed as potentially suffering from illnesses or disabilities. We will also respond to the needs of other users such as teenagers, adults, senior citizens, and men and women struggling with other challenges, including parenting children with illnesses and disabilities."<sup>55</sup> The foundation thus joined the ranks of "soft" pro-life groups, which run hotlines for women with unplanned pregnancies and occasionally provide assistance to individuals in difficult situations who have no means of support or are unable to apply for it.

"Soft," life-affirming images therefore prompt the same activists to undertake rescue efforts: attempts to save every life regardless of the cost or consequences. As in the case of "hard"

abortion imagery, it is the disseminators' own community that ends up being mobilized in the intended manner by ontohegemonically positioned "soft" images of conceived children. Retracing the impact of pro-life images on society at large is a complex research endeavor that would be difficult to carry out.<sup>56</sup> My intention here is only to demonstrate that this influence is ambiguous and mobilizes forces of resistance.

The aid provided by "soft" organizations does not lend itself well to visualization. It is relatively easy to depict donations or renovation work: such images are in fact staples of the communication tradition associated with Christian charity. By contrast, financial assistance, such as in the form of renting an apartment, is more difficult to visualize; it can only be described verbally. What remains outside the realm of visualization are the essential aspects of this type of activism: counseling, attempts to collaboratively navigate (despite the challenges and ambiguities) a complex and unique set of circumstances, and, more importantly, listening to the story of someone who made the decision to call or write to the organization.<sup>57</sup>

There is a notable turn occurring in the activism of "soft" pro-life aid groups: their emphasis is shifting from "saving children" to "helping women." This process will gradually lead to the (incomplete) dethroning of the conceived child as an ontohegemonic object. It is reflected in the iconic realm: the illustrations posted on these groups' websites and social media pages depict children with declining frequency (the less often, the more consciously "pro-woman" the organization is). The organizations are currently facing an iconic vacuum – how



Graphics of the pro-life aid organization Stowarzyszenie Dwie Kreski, source: <https://www.dwiekreski.pl/materialy/>; <https://www.facebook.com/2kreski/>

does one illustrate aid given to people to whom one owes a duty of discretion? The only visual resources available are drawings or photographs of women, seen in profile or from behind, gazing into the distance, or symbols such as an outstretched helping hand,<sup>58</sup> paired with the universal slogan used by many pro-life and pro-choice organizations: “You’re not alone.”

These images are weak, but they have the most going on beneath the surface. They demand the presence of women who have been erased by the ontohegemony of the fetus, which is established by images of abortion and prenatal development alike. They point to the problems that are rendered invisible by pro-choice movements, which grant women agency while neglecting to probe the reasons behind what is believed to be the free choice to terminate a pregnancy: helplessness, hesitation, or the need for support in making a decision. Of course, a person’s weakness and fragility in a time of crisis can be exploited to exert ideological pressure, but it also opens up the possibility of sisterhood that differs from its feminist practice.<sup>59</sup>

“As frames break from themselves in order to install themselves, other possibilities for apprehension emerge,” Judith Butler writes.<sup>60</sup> One cannot convincingly depict the ontology of dependence using the tools of visual hegemony (as demonstrated by Fundacja Nasze Dzieci’s unsuccessful use of the slogan: “I’m dependent, I trust you”), but it can be spoken about using a set of practices that break the pro-life frame as they attempt to install it. To support a woman and respond to her needs (in the hope that she will carry a child to term), it may be necessary to compromise by respecting her choices, even if they are



Graphics of evangelical aid organizations Misja Nie Jesteś Sama and Kobietom na Pomoc, source: <https://www.facebook.com/misjaniejestessama>; <https://www.facebook.com/KobietomNaPomoc>

incompatible with the conservative ideological frames.

### III. Fragile life and the ethics of care

A field in which pro-life and pro-choice<sup>61</sup> aid organizations could meet is that of the ethics of care, supported by relational ontologies. They could meet, but they do not, because the dominant deontological frames of their actions are complementary, not cooperative. Within these frames, however, exist numerous gaps through which it is possible to glimpse what is common to both.

As a point of departure for the discussion concluding this article, I would like to revisit the previously cited text by Judith Butler, this time shifting the emphasis to its proposed framing of precariousness. No discourse, Butler claims, is able to fully accommodate precariousness. Life is also precarious, as it can be lost or harmed, and its very existence creates the potential for mourning.

Precariousness is the condition binding human and non-human animals, but we do not perceive every fragile life as worthy of protection, because – among other reasons – it is impossible to sustain all life, and the process of degradation comprises a substantial part of every lifespan. To survive, a life must be deemed worthy of survival. “There is no life without the conditions of life,” Butler writes, pointing to the key question we must ask ourselves: “whether the social conditions of persistence and flourishing are or are not possible.”<sup>62</sup> This question is always tied to the most difficult ethical dilemmas. Though it won’t solve every problem, we can strive to create social conditions that will minimize precariousness in egalitarian ways,<sup>63</sup> which involves



Graphics of the pro-choice aid organization Aborcyjny Dream Team, source: <https://www.facebook.com/aborcyjnydreamteam>

rethinking the ontology of the body<sup>64</sup> as something precarious, dependent, and social.

As Agata Chełstowska observes, in reference to the feminist concept of reproductive justice,<sup>65</sup> freedom from precariousness and the potential to survive are often the results of social privilege. Feminist theologian Thia Cooper reaches a similar conclusion, describing abortion as a consequence of social constraints and conflicts. The mistake pro-lifers make, she says, is that they focus on the beginnings of life, whereas life requires support at every stage – the kind of support that guarantees a dignified life “of abundance.”<sup>66</sup>

Theories of reproductive justice have inspired even more ambitious proposals, including an alliance between the ideas of reproductive and environmental justice, one that would transcend the life/choice dichotomy and be grounded in eco-feminist compassion for proper living conditions for everyone: other people’s children and other species.<sup>67</sup>

The broader the notion of care, the bolder the utopia, which fails to account for the exhaustibility of natural resources and conflicting interests as it pursues – from a different angle – the concept of saving every life and praising life in general. These ideas once again veer sharply away from concrete situations, where action must be undertaken in the face of limitations, weaknesses, and uncertainties.

Aid movements that place themselves outside the pro-life and pro-choice dichotomy would do well, in my opinion, to take a fresh look at images (and beyond them). Among the authors who have recommended this approach is Ashlyn Jaeger,<sup>68</sup> who points to the use of a biomedical model of a fetus constructed with the help of sight and sound. As Jaeger argues, the technical intermediation of perception and the reliance on technoscientific interventions for survival lay bare the hybrid character of the fetus and the reproductive body: the blurring of the boundaries between human, animal, and machine. The consequence of

this perspective is the blurring of boundaries between the fetus and the woman, and the perception of their relationship as a dynamic socio-material process, the most important component of which is the experience of the pregnant mother. The scholar proposes a “cybernetic” concept of personhood, comprising the social and economic conditions of life, technologies, self-surveillance, and risk assessment. In light of this concept, Jaeger notes, the choice to have a therapeutic abortion after the twentieth week of pregnancy can be interpreted as a gesture of motherly compassion and can be synonymous with loss.

The point of the “cybernetic” concept, therefore, is not to create new types of visuals but to interpret existing images in a new, contextual manner, unencumbered by ideologization and naïve techno-rationalism,<sup>69</sup> focused on negotiation. This new interpretation of images could help us rethink the possibility of caring for what is perceived as precarious.

- 1 It is worth pointing out that many (if not all) of the findings regarding the use of images by pro-life movements are universal in nature; however, the scope of my fieldwork prevents me from drawing such conclusions based on material collected in Poland (including translations of foreign publications for activists and therapists).
- 2 Because the main purpose of this article is to examine how images function, there is no room for a wider presentation of the activism of pro-life groups or an attempt to answer the research question formulated above.
- 3 The best-known retreat of this type is “Winnica Racheli,” adapted from the American program Rachel’s Vineyard. Retreats are also held by the Basilica of Our Lady of Licheń, Centrum Służby Rodzinie [Family Service Center] in Łódź, and Wspólnota Niewidzialnego Klasztoru Jana Pawła II [the Community of the Invisible Monastery of John Paul II].
- 4 Roch Sulima, *Antropologia codzienności* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2000), 10.

- 5 Inga Koralewska, "'Socjologia aborcji'. Sposoby przedstawiania aborcji we współczesnym dyskursie nauk społecznych," *Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej* vol. 16, no. 2 (May 31, 2020), 170–187. The most comprehensive sociological study of abortion in Poland was conducted over a decade ago by Ewelina Wejbert-Wąsiewicz, who attempted to investigate these experiences. Cf. idem, *Aborcja: między ideologią a doświadczeniem indywidualnym: monografia zjawiska* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2011), and idem, "Enklawy i eksklawy aborcyjne – dynamika i źródło zmian," *Opuscula Sociologica* no. 2 (2014), 31–41. The author's later works discuss, inter alia, methods used to depict abortion in Polish cinema. See: idem, "Problematyka niechcianej ciąży i aborcji w filmie polskim. Ideologia, polityka, rzeczywistość," *Sztuka i Dokumentacja* no. 18 (2018), 259–272. According to Wejbert-Wąsiewicz's findings, pro-life ideology forms the cognitive frame in Polish films. The absence of more comprehensive sociological and ethnographic studies in recent years does not mean that Polish scholars do not (or have not) produced meaningful analyses of abortion in other fields: in fact, many examples are cited herein. However, even a cursory review of the literature would exceed the scope of this article. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the experience of abortion – which remains relatively inaccessible to academic researchers – has been recorded and problematized by social movements, for example through published herstories and abortion storytelling, which call for a separate analysis.
- 6 Cf. Koralewska, "'Socjologia aborcji'"; Janine D. Simpson and A. Brown, "Viewing Ultrasound Images in the Abortion Clinic: Clients' and Health Care Professionals' Opinions," *The European Journal of Contraception and Reproductive Health Care* vol. 24, no. 2 (2019). It should be noted that, contrary to the belief often held by pro-lifers, the visual experiences associated with pharmacological abortion are not traumatic per se. They can be associated with sadness if the fetus is already fully formed, but can also provide confidence in the efficacy of the abortion. Cf. *Normalnie o aborcji*, eds. Natalia Broniarczyk and Karolina Więckiewicz (Kobiety w Sieci, 2018).
- 7 Interestingly, uncertainty with regard to the visible can be more desirable than certainty, as it opens up a space of possibilities, including positive ones. Cf. Kate Reed, Inna Kochetkova, and Elspeth Whitby, "Visualising Uncertainty: Examining Women's Views on the Role of Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) in Late Pregnancy," *Social Science & Medicine* no. 164 (2016).
- 8 Joanne Boucher, "Ultrasound: A Window to the Womb? Obstetric Ultrasound and the Abortion Rights Debate," *Journal of Medical Humanities* vol. 25, no. 1 (2004).

- 9 Cf. for example, Julie Palmer, "Seeing and Knowing: Ultrasound Images in the Contemporary Abortion Debate," *Feminist Theory* vol. 10, no. 2 (August 2009); Nick Hopkins, Suzanne Zeedyk, and Fiona Raitt, "Visualising Abortion: Emotion Discourse and Fetal Imagery in a Contemporary Abortion Debate," *Social Science & Medicine* vol. 61, no. 2 (2005).
- 10 Andrzej W. Nowak, "'Dziecko poczęte' jako obiekt ontohegemoniczny. Obiekty, materialność i wizualizacja a procesy ustanawiania hegemonii," *AVANT. The Journal of the Philosophical-Interdisciplinary Vanguard* vol. 11, no. 3 (2020).
- 11 Keith Cassidy, "Interpreting the Pro-Life Movement: Recurrent Themes and Recent Trends," *Life and Learning* no. 9 (2000).
- 12 Dariusz Krawczyk, "Działalność na rzecz obrony życia," [www.swietyjosef.kalisz.pl/OtoczmyTroskaZycie/19.html](http://www.swietyjosef.kalisz.pl/OtoczmyTroskaZycie/19.html) (accessed September 1, 2021).
- 13 Jerzy Drążkiewicz, *Świadectwo i pomoc. O ruchach antyaborcyjnych w Warszawie* (Warsaw: Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw, 1988).
- 14 *The Silent Scream*, dir. Jack Dabner, 1984. The film depicts the abortion procedure as an act of murder and a traumatic event.
- 15 Dorota Sajewska, "Archeologia traumy aborcyjnej," *Didaskalia* no. 139–140 (2017).
- 16 Held on November 14, 2018, as part of a workshop on social movements.
- 17 Fundacja Pro's message is supported by Fundacja Życie i Rodzina [the Life and Family Foundation], formed in the wake of a split in Fundacja Pro.
- 18 Elżbieta Korolczuk, "Odzyskiwanie języka, czyli jak zmieniła się debata o aborcji w kontekście Czarnych Protestów i Strajków Kobiet," in: *Bunt kobiet. Czarne Protesty i Strajki Kobiet*, eds. Elżbieta Korolczuk et al. (Gdańsk: Europejskie Centrum Solidarności, 2019), 133. Significant feminist analyses of pro-life movements have been published as part of the project *Ruchy antyaborcyjne w Polsce. Sprzeciw. Walka. prawa kobiet*, <https://lodzkiedziewuchy.org.pl/publikacje/> (accessed December 15, 2021). The emergence of "soft" pro-life groups has several causes. Among them is the critical assessment of the efficacy of various models of action by individual social actors, experiencing fatigue with the culture wars, who instead turned toward positive models with tangible effects.
- 19 It is difficult to estimate the number and size of "soft" pro-life groups. The campaigns around which such groups coalesce (such as those launched by Fr. Kancelarczyk) do not reach all the activists dispersed throughout the country. Pro-life aid groups vary in

form: some are hotlines run by a handful of volunteers under the aegis of a local parish, while others are foundations employing a dozen activists, or associations with databases of hundreds of volunteers who are called upon as needed.

- 20 Bruno Latour, "Visualisation and Cognition: Drawing Things Together," in: *Knowledge and Society: Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present* vol. 6, ed. Henrika Kuklick (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1986), 17.
- 21 *Wybierz życie*, exhibition, <https://stronazycia.pl/fundacja/wystawy/> (accessed September 2, 2021).
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Trent Horn, *Persuasive Pro-Life: How to Talk about Our Culture's Toughest Issue* (El Caho, California: Catholic Answers, 2014), e-book.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Palmer, "Seeing and Knowing," 176.
- 27 Hopkins, Zeedyk, and Raitt, "Visualising Abortion," 400.
- 28 Ibid., 398–402.
- 29 Palmer, "Seeing and Knowing."
- 30 Marek Krajewski, "Słabe obrazy – obrazy słabych," [www.pismowidok.org/pl/archiwum/2015/9-pomniki-transformacji/slabe-obrazy](http://www.pismowidok.org/pl/archiwum/2015/9-pomniki-transformacji/slabe-obrazy) (accessed January 30, 2022).
- 31 Władysława Bryła, "Skandalizacja jako sposób walki o wartości," *Białostockie Archiwum Językowe* no. 17 (2017).
- 32 Jan Kulesza, "Publiczne prezentowanie zdjęć martwych płodów jako nieobyczajny wybryk (art. 140 Kodeksu wykroczeń)," *Studia Prawnicze* no. 2 (2019); idem, "Wybryk publicznego prezentowania zdjęć martwych płodów a ochrona wolności wypowiedzi w świetle orzecznictwa ETPC." *Studia Prawniczo-Ekonomiczne* no. 114 (2020).
- 33 "Szantaż z dala od szpitala" [Keep your blackmail away from hospitals], campaign by the political party Razem, [www.zdalaodszpitala.pl](http://www.zdalaodszpitala.pl) (accessed September 2, 2021). It is worth noting that in the debate over the "size" and "human-like appearance" of the fetus at various stages of development, pro-lifers always cite the largest value possible at a particular stage. This is also true of the plastic "educational" figurine "Jaś," which is

intended to represent a ten-week-old fetus. The artificial material and the rather imprecise crafting of the model make any discussion of the fidelity of the representation's details irresolvable. The same is true of photos of dead fetuses: it is difficult to determine the age of a fetus based on an image of its dismembered parts, particularly if one is not a specialist in the field of embryology. Fetuses are made to appear "more human" by manipulating the composition and perspective (close-ups, angles, proximity to other objects).

- 34 Cf., for example, MS, "Jak 'prolejferzy' manipulują wizerunkami płodów," *Newsweek*, March 27, 2018, [www.newsweek.pl/wiedza/nauka/jak-prolejferzy-manipuluja-wizerunkami-plodow/jk34j6w](http://www.newsweek.pl/wiedza/nauka/jak-prolejferzy-manipuluja-wizerunkami-plodow/jk34j6w) (accessed September 8, 2021). Pro-life activists like to use photos of late-term abortions, which are now rarely performed and usually occur in the case of fetal abnormalities.
- 35 Beata Rusiecka, "Opinia psychologiczna," [https://stronazycia.pl/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/opinia\\_psychologiczna\\_Wystawa\\_Wyberz\\_Zycie.pdf](https://stronazycia.pl/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/opinia_psychologiczna_Wystawa_Wyberz_Zycie.pdf) (accessed September 8, 2021).
- 36 Beata Rusiecka is a therapist who works for the Christian program *Żywa Nadzieja* [Living Hope], which provides trauma therapy, including post-abortion therapy. Cf. <http://zywanadzieja.pl/terapia/dla-kogo/> (accessed September 9, 2021). "Post-abortion syndrome" and "survivor syndrome" (the trauma connected to abortion, experienced by women or other people associated with the termination of a pregnancy, particularly children whose "siblings" have been aborted) are terms encountered exclusively in Christian psychotherapy and pro-life discourse. The medicalization of ideological beliefs as a rhetorical strategy warrants a separate discussion. For an example of this type of analysis of "post-abortion" syndrome, see: Beata Zadumińska, "Syndrom postaborcyjny. Laboratorium hodowania kryzysu," in: *A jak hipokryzja. Antologia tekstów o aborcji, władzy, pieniądzu i sprawiedliwości*, ed. Claudia Snochowska-Gonzalez (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo O Matko!, 2011). Studies conducted on large samples of individuals have failed to confirm the claim that regret is commonly experienced in the aftermath of an abortion. Cf. Diana Greene Foster, *The Turnaway Study: Ten Years, a Thousand Women, and the Consequences of Having – or Being Denied – an Abortion* (New York: Scribner, 2020).
- 37 Some Christian sources claim that not all women suffer from post-abortion syndrome, but, in the view of Christian therapists, the majority of women – particularly morally and religiously sensitive individuals – are at risk.
- 38 Cf. Wejbert-Wąsiewicz, *Aborcja*.

- 39 Of course, full autonomy of choice, unhindered by any circumstances, is utopian – the point here is that a woman may feel that the decision was made of her own volition, and was not forced upon her by others or tragic circumstances.
- 40 Nancy Michels, *Helping Women Recover from Abortion* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1988), 73.
- 41 *Maternità interrotte: le conseguenze psichiche dell'IVG*, eds. Tonino Cantelmi, Cristina Cacace, and Elisabetta Pittino (San Paolo: Cinisello Balsamo, 2011).
- 42 Benedetta Foà, *Le doglie del ri-nascere: donne e uomini raccontano il dramma dell'aborto* (Sao Paolo: Cinisello Balsamo, 2018).
- 43 Retreats also offer other significant psychotherapeutic benefits, the discussion of which is beyond the scope of this article.
- 44 It is best to assume that religious beliefs are not the only possible motivation influencing the decision to carry a pregnancy to term in the event of an unfavorable prenatal diagnosis. However, other narratives do not enjoy the same public visibility.
- 45 Wojciech Kućko, "Dylematy etyczne dotyczące badań prenatalnych prowadzonych w Polsce," *Teologia i Moralność* vol. 14, no. 1 (2019).
- 46 Fundacja Gajusz, "Informator dla rodziców," <https://gajusz.org.pl/dla-potrzebujacych/poradniki/> (accessed September 8, 2021), 23. It is worth noting that the testimonies and photographs do not depict badly deformed children.
- 47 This is a readily observable relationship. The impact of images on a wider audience is very difficult to study due to the context in which opinions are voiced, their volatility and contextuality, and limitations stemming from the research methods and their intended use. For these reasons, I treat opinion polls as ideological tools rather than instruments with which to probe the public imagination.
- 48 In the case of Fundacja Pro, this effect is compounded by the foundation's parallel campaign Stop Pedofilii [Stop Pedophilia], which opposes sex education and LGBT rights. This is a highly significant connection, which I do not discuss as it exceeds the scope of this essay, as are the equally important links between Polish pro-life circles and international networks with a similar profile of activity.

- 49 On the concept of emotional labor, see: Arlie Russel Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 2012).
- 50 Zofia Kończewska-Murdzek, "Afirmacja dziecka w łonie matki – podstawą cywilizacji miłości," *Fides et Ratio* no. 4 (2014), [www.stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/Presentations0/2014-4Murdzek.pdf](http://www.stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/Presentations0/2014-4Murdzek.pdf) (accessed September 10, 2021), 222–239.
- 51 The topic of abortion is present in the foundation's educational efforts, but only marginally so. Abortion is portrayed in words and testimonies, and less frequently using animation.
- 52 Cf. Nowak, "'Dziecko poczęte.'" Nowak refers here to the theory of hegemony formulated by Chantal Mouffe and Ernest Laclau. [http://avant.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/A\\_W\\_Nowak\\_Dziecko\\_poczete.pdf](http://avant.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/A_W_Nowak_Dziecko_poczete.pdf).
- 53 Marta Ciastoch, "Tyle kosztowały 'prorodzinne' i antyaborcyjne plakaty. Policzyły, co można kupić zamiast nich," *Noizz*, March 11, 2021, <https://noizz.pl/spoleczenstwo/tyle-kosztowaly-prorodzinne-i-antyaborcyjne-plakaty-policzyly-co-mozna-kupic-zamiast/lyyI9z6> (accessed September 9, 2021).
- 54 Katarzyna Pachelska, "Hospicja perinatalne. Billboardy z dzieckiem w sercu zwróciły na nie uwagę. Rodzice oczekujący na dziecko nie wiedzą o tych ośrodkach," *Dziennik Zachodni*, February 18, 2021, <https://dziennikzachodni.pl/hospicja-perinatalne-billboardy-z-dzieckiem-w-sercu-zwrocily-na-nie-uwage-rodzice-oczekujacy-na-dziecko-nie-wiedza-o-tych/ar/c6-15449522> (accessed September 9, 2021); Sławomir Zagórski, "Specjalistka kardiologii płodu i opieki perinatalnej, przeciwniczka aborcji oskarża rząd," *Oko.press*, May 24, 2021, <https://oko.press/cal-y-system-dziala-zle-lekarka-ktora-25-lat-zajmuje-sie-opieka-perinatalna/> (accessed December 15, 2021).
- 55 "Halo? Tu Telefon Nadziei!" [www.fundacjakornice.pl/pl/aktualnosci/halo-halo-tu-telefon-nadziei-](http://www.fundacjakornice.pl/pl/aktualnosci/halo-halo-tu-telefon-nadziei-) (accessed September 3, 2021).

- 56 Federacja na Rzecz Kobiet i Planowania Rodziny [the Federation for Women and Family Planning] commissioned IBRiS to conduct a survey gauging the efficacy of the campaign carried out by Fundacja Nasze Dzieci. According to the subsequent report, the campaign had no effect on the views of most respondents, and those who were swayed by it became more liberal. Cf. "Aborcyjne billboardy nieskuteczne! Mamy wyniki sondażu," *Federa.org*, May 4, 2021, <https://federa.org.pl/antyaborcyjne-billboardy-nieskuteczne> (accessed September 7, 2021). Cf. footnote 47.
- 57 I do not analyze the relationships between the stories shared with the hotline and those published on pro-life and pro-choice websites presenting the testimonies of women, as this discussion would exceed the scope of this article.
- 58 Similar illustrations of collaborating, fighting, and helping hands, along with silhouettes of women, are used by pro-choice organizations. However, the women portrayed in the illustrations and photographs show their faces and look back at the viewer's gaze.
- 59 I refer here to sisterhood because it is usually women who help other women, both in the abortion process and in carrying the pregnancy to term. However, in the pro-life movements I encountered, men would also volunteer to staff the hotlines. Pro-life and pro-choice movements differ in the way they practice sisterhood and women's communities: they are grounded in different visions of agency, mediated by different rituals, and accompanied by different emotional and symbolic codes and different types of speech. Within the pro-life movement, communication codes (and even visions of agency) differ from one group to another. This, however, is a topic for a different discussion.
- 60 Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London, New York: Verso, 2009), 12.
- 61 By pro-choice aid organizations I mean groups that help women with unplanned pregnancies secure abortions. As with pro-life groups, they focus on fieldwork rather than fighting to effect legislative change.
- 62 Butler, *Frames of War*, 19–20.
- 63 *Ibid.*, 54.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 33.

- 65 Agata Chełstowska, "Sprawiedliwość społeczna i sprawiedliwość reprodukcyjna – nowe ramy dla ruchu na rzecz dostępnej aborcji," in: *A jak hipokryzja. Antologia tekstów o aborcji, władzy, pieniądzu i sprawiedliwości*, ed. Claudia Snochowska-Gonzalez (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo O Matko!, 2011).
- 66 Thia Cooper (in conversation with Karol Kleczka), "Poza pro-life i pro-choice," *Znak* no. 5 (2021).
- 67 Catalina M. de Onís, "Reproductive Justice as Environmental Justice: Contexts, Coalitions, and Cautions," in: *The Routledge Companion to Motherhood*, eds. Lynn O'Brien Hallstein et al. (New York: Routledge, 2020).
- 68 Ashlyn Jaeger, "(Re)Producing Cyborgs: Biomedicalizing Abortion through the Congressional Debate over Fetal Pain," *Science, Technology, & Human Values* vol. 44, no. 1 (2019).
- 69 Momo Wilms-Crowe, "Technology and Scientific Authority in United States Abortion Policy: Concerns Over a Mechanistic Approach and a Better Way Forward," *Oregon Undergraduate Research Journal* no. 1 (2020).

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