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**When reproductive rights are criminalized: cross-border abortions and a case study of the  
Ciocia Collectives**

*Diploma Thesis*

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Prague 2023

## Declaration of Honor

I declare that I wrote the thesis independently using the sources dutifully cited and listed in the bibliography. The thesis was not used to obtain a different or the same title.

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*Savanah Catalina*

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Savanah Catalina

In Prague, 30 June 2023

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank my partner, friends, and family for continuing to encourage me while writing this thesis. Thank you for the continual reminders that I am capable and qualified to produce such a piece of writing. Thank you for talking through ideas with me and listening to my concerns which sometimes seemed endless. Because of you all I never felt alone.

Thank to my supervisor, Věra Sokolová, for guiding me through the process and helping me greatly in moments where I felt stuck. Your viewpoint was what led me to be able to envision what this thesis could become.

Finally, thank you to Ciocia Basia, Ciocia Wienia, and Ciocia Czesia for the tremendous work that you all do and for taking the time out of your busy schedules to sit down for an interview with me. Thank you for trusting me with sharing your stories.

## Abstract

This research examines qualitative interviews with three informal feminist collectives: Ciocia Basia, Ciocia Wienia, and Ciocia Czesia. The Ciocia collectives are located in Central Europe, specifically Germany, Austria, and the Czech Republic, and work to organize abortions for people mainly living in Poland where abortion access is highly restricted. Every member of the collective is a volunteer and the group does not profit from their activism. While prior research has been conducted on individuals who are forced to travel to receive reproductive care, little current research exists on the abortion organizing groups who assist them in the process. The Ciocia collectives work tirelessly to organize cross-border abortions including arranging accommodation, appointments, funding, translation services, and more. This work poses a unique set of challenges and opportunities which will be further explored.

*Keywords: abortion, reproductive justice, cross-border abortions, feminist solidarity, borders, boundaries*

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Topic Introduction

For years, individuals who live in areas with abortion restrictions or bans have travelled to other countries or states in order to receive safe abortions. Despite numerous strides in obtaining reproductive rights, today there are many newly instated abortion restrictions across the world in countries such as Poland, the United States, and many more. Because of this, the cross-border abortion phenomenon continues today and impacts the lives of many. Travelling to another country to have a medical abortion can be extremely costly as the individual must pay for travel expenses, accommodation, and the actual procedure. This process can also be particularly complex due to country specific guidelines on who can, and who cannot, receive medical care in a given country, and under what circumstances it is considered legal. Language barriers, inconsistencies in interpretation of law, and other factors also play a role.

Due to these barriers, many are unable to travel abroad to receive the abortion they require. This can result in the individual enduring forced birth or dying from attempts to abort the fetus in an unsafe manner. Restrictions on reproductive care such as abortions can also lead to parental death in cases of fetal complications or other general health concerns of the fetus or pregnant person. Although some restrictive abortion laws do allow for abortion in these cases, many physicians wait till it is far too late to perform the abortion because they fear the consequences of the law. This demonstrates that the right to have an abortion is a human right that can often mean life or death for the pregnant individual.

Although many are diligently advocating and working to change these laws, those who live in said countries must find a way to survive these conditions for the time being. As mentioned, one way to do this is to travel abroad to receive reproductive care. In order to ease the associated complications with cross-border abortions and ensure abortions are accessible for all, individuals have mobilized globally to form abortion referral networks, fundraising initiatives, feminist collectives, NGOs, and more. For decades, these groups have existed to raise money for the accompanying costs of cross-border abortions, organize travel, and provide life-saving information. This activism often requires great effort that is directly benefiting individuals from

around the world. Organizing in such a way exhibits the potential for feminist solidarity as these groups are working in unison to lessen the oppression of women and people with the ability to become pregnant through knowledge sharing and collective mobilization, regardless of if the problem is hindering themselves directly.

While much research exists on the individuals who are forced to travel to receive reproductive care, there has been little in-depth research on the people who help them. In order to uncover the nuanced difficulties experienced while engaging in this work, I will be conducting interviews with Ciocia Basia, Ciocia Wienia, and Ciocia Czesia, three informal feminist collectives who arrange cross-border abortions for people mostly residing in Poland. Each is located in a different country, namely Germany, Austria, and the Czech Republic, providing services in close proximity to Poland, which has some of the worst abortion restrictions in Central Europe. Although sharing a name, each collective operates independently from one another and are considered separate collectives. Individually they must navigate laws specific to their own country and raise their own funding for abortions and related costs. Still, they collaborate when necessary in order to achieve the desired result for the pregnant person in need.

In conducting this research my hope is that by providing a focused case study, current barriers and experiences related to abortion organizing will be revealed, leading to a better understanding of what is needed and what challenges are faced. Before examining the interviews, it is essential to provide a theoretical background of reproductive justice, historical context of Poland's abortion legislation, and past efforts of abortion organizing globally. I will be examining abortion bans and accessibility in Poland historically and presently, cross-border abortions throughout time, and previous and current efforts of feminist groups to provide reproductive care transnationally, especially abortions. Moreover, I will detail the history and makeup of the Ciocia collectives as it vital to the later analysis. In this overview, I also aim to highlight that reproductive rights are an international issue that requires cross-border activism.

## 1.2 Key Terms



### 1.2.1 Body Autonomy

Body autonomy, as the name suggests, means to have autonomy over one's own body. The right to body autonomy is the right to make decisions regarding your own body and to have the freedom to choose what happens to it. Although this concept may appear as a given, for many marginalized communities this right was, and continues to be, something in which it is necessary to fight for. Body autonomy is often closely linked with feminism, as having bodily autonomy is essential for reaching equality in our society. To give someone the ability to make decisions about another person's body is to give that individual power over the other; and equality cannot transpire if an imbalance of power exists. This term is also intently entangled with reproductive rights because in order to have true bodily autonomy, one must be able to have the freedom to choose to become, or to not become, pregnant. Once this freedom is taken away, one loses the right to bodily autonomy and may be forced to undergo forced birth or sterilization.

### 1.2.2 Abortion

Although abortion discourse is so lengthy and complex that an entire manuscript could be written on the subject alone, it is important to mention why abortion is a prime feminist concern and the stance this paper asserts. The right to safe abortion access is attributed to the right to health and therefore the right to life. The World Health Organization (WHO) adequately defines 'health' as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". Without proper access to abortion, many individuals with unwanted pregnancies will attempt to abort the fetus in an unsafe manner. This is not always done successfully, and can end in death. It is estimated that more than 70,000 individuals worldwide die each year as a consequence of an unsafe abortion attempt (Zampas & Gher, 2008). Without access to reproductive healthcare, women and people with the ability to become pregnant risk their lives with the aspiration to have personal and bodily autonomy. Abortions can also be lifesaving in cases of wanted or planned pregnancies, as they are used for nonviable fetuses and for complicated pregnancies which put the life of the child bearer at risk. This paper therefore assumes that abortion is an integral form of reproductive care and a human right, as they are necessary for survival in many cases, and increase life expectancy by reducing unsafe abortion attempts by the individual (Zampas & Gher, 2008).

### 1.2.3 Abortifacient Medicines

Abortifacient medicines or abortion pills are another means that can be used to help aid pregnant people terminate their pregnancies (Hervey & Sheldon, 2017). Abortion pills can be more cost effective than travelling across borders as it saves money on transportation, accommodation, and the actual medical procedure. These pills can also be ordered online and delivered in most countries, allowing certain laws and restrictions to be bypassed. However, there are some negative side effects of abortion pills and they are not always 100% effective. Two of the groups that offer tele-medical services are Women on Web and Women Help Women (Hervey & Sheldon, 2017). These groups are able to provide abortion pills to pregnant people in Ireland by utilizing prescriptions written in different countries (Hervey & Sheldon, 2017). Although there are certain limitations with abortion pills, this service can be extremely useful in ensuring reproductive healthcare globally, especially in countries where abortion is banned or restricted.

## Chapter 2: Theory and Background Research

### 2.1 Reproductive Justice

Reproductive Justice is an important key term that will serve as the theoretical framework for this thesis. It is a concept that has drastically altered how feminists and others view reproductive rights and the fight for reproductive freedom. In order to provide an adequate description of reproductive justice and what it entails, I will briefly discuss its origins and developments that lead it to become the concept it is today. To begin, discourse on reproductive rights has existed for quite some time, with first wave feminists advocating for the right to even deny sex as a form of birth control (Ross, 2017). Initially the reproductive rights movement was led by predominately white women, as they were the ones who held the power to speak and be heard. Because of this, the movement predominately accounted for the experiences of white women, and ignored other systemic barriers that may lead to reproductive oppression. Consequently, white women decided which issues were given priority and what concerns would be brought to the forefront. As such, white reproductive experiences were treated as the standard as the fight for reproductive rights preceded, creating change that only a fraction of people would benefit from.

In 1944, in the tradition of the Combahee River Collective, the term “reproductive justice” was coined by twelve black women who were involved with the pro-choice movement (Ross, 2017). The Combahee River Collective was a group of black feminists in Boston, Massachusetts that were committed to combatting all systems of oppression (Alonso-bejarano, 2018). They were formed in 1973 during the second-wave of feminism in the United States, and were perhaps the first to offer an analysis of intersectionality before the term even came to be (Taylor, 2019). In producing “A Black Feminist Statement” (1977) the Combahee River Collective made it clear that liberation for white women was not liberation for all, as second wave feminism failed to grasp the racial oppression experienced by black women, and black movements failed to grasp the gendered oppression experienced by black women. This statement was theoretically groundbreaking, as it declared that identity cannot be separated into segments, so a movement concerned with only one aspect of your identity does not have the power to liberate you (Combahee River Collective, 1977). By this logic, the white-led reproductive rights movement

occurring at the time was insufficient, leading members of the Combahee River Collective to create reproductive justice.

According to Loretta Ross, one of the 12 women who created the term, reproductive justice was created to “recognize the commonality of our experiences and, from the sharing and growing consciousness, to build a politics that will change our lives and inevitably end our oppression” (The Combahee River Collective, 2016, as cited in, Ross, 2017, p. 286). Ultimately, it is a strategy that was created in an effort to challenge reproductive oppression at all levels (Luna & Luker, 2013). Reproductive justice therefore incorporates intersectionality so that all identities are revered when fighting for reproductive freedoms, and all non-white experiences of reproductive oppression are rightfully considered and accounted for (Ross, 2017).

Intersectionality is key here, as it gives us the ability to shed light onto the intersecting oppressions that may impact whether or not someone has the ability to make a choice in regards to their reproductive health and abilities (Ross, 2017). As the reproductive justice continued to develop, it soon became clear that reproductive rights were leaving out a large part of reproductive autonomy, the right to have a child.

For quite some time the mainstream reproductive rights movement prioritized abortion and birth control access, as, once again, this was the issue that faced most white women at the time. These rights, while important, only concerned an individual’s right to not have a child. Meanwhile, many women in the United States who were either poor, disabled, or of color, had their right to have children stripped away from them entirely either by forced sterilization or coerced contraception (Luna & Luker, 2013). Without reproductive justice, it is unclear when, or if ever, these severe concerns would have been addressed. Therefore, the tied group of human rights that reproductive justice is based off of according to Loretta J. Ross (2017) are,

1. The right to have a child under the conditions of one’s choosing;
2. The right not to have a child using birth control, abortion, or abstinence;
3. The right to parent children in safe and healthy environments free from violence by individuals or the state. (p. 290)

Although reproductive justice is more than a law-focused movement, it still acknowledges the large role the government can play. Reproductive justice calls for the right of privacy and freedom from governmental interference, yet holds the expectation that the government will take appropriate measures to ensure equal and fair treatment for all (Luna and Luker, 2013). As we can see from history, the government has the power to both restrict and permit reproductive freedom. Although most commonly thought of as laws restricting an individual's ability to terminate a pregnancy, many laws have existed that actually prevented pregnancy all together. For instance, in the U.S. between 1900 and the late 1970's, around 30 different states passed laws that legalized the sterilization of individuals who were deemed criminal, feeble-minded, insane, or degenerate (Luna & Leker, 2013). Feeble-mindedness in the U.S. could then be defined as engaging in prostitution, or even being overcome with alcoholism. This example demonstrates how it is not enough to advocate solely for abortion rights. Doing so would ignore the "intersectional oppressions of white supremacy, misogyny, and neoliberalism" (Ross, 2017, p. 290).

Still, there are many factors that will impact an individual's ability to choose to have a child or not, regardless of any changes to the law. Systemic inequality will always play a role unless it is adequately addressed (Ross, 2017). We have seen many changes to laws that concern reproductive freedoms that have had disproportionate effects on certain populations because the law can only go so far. For instance, despite instating various laws about reproductive choice in the United States, black women continued to be sterilized and have their reproductive freedom stripped from them, in more covert ways, at unprecedented numbers due to perpetual racism and the vilification of black women's sexuality and motherhood (Ross, 2017). As we can see, enforced laws are necessary but do not always guarantee equitable, fair treatment. Reproductive justice provides us the ability to examine the law and see what its limits are in regards to reaching actual justice. The law is useless unless you have the ability to exercise your rights and actually choose.

In sum, reproductive justice utilizes intersectionality to create a concept that is ever evolving and goes beyond the narrow frame of the law. It encompasses both the right to deny having children and the right to have children (Luna & Luker, 2013). It is "fundamentally anti-essentialist" and

cannot be reduced to identity politics (Ross, 2017, p.290). It “resists white ethnocentric feminist histories, theories, and practices that claim to represent all women” (Ross, 2017, p.298).

Reproductive justice allows us to analyze reproductive issues with an intersectional lens (Luna & Luker, 2013), and in doing so demands full reproductive and sexual human rights for all (Ross, 2017). Importantly, reproductive justice provides a framework which highlights that caring for the most vulnerable and marginalized communities will ultimately have an impactful ripple effect on us all (Wade, 2023).

## 2.2 Historical Context

I will now focus on the history of reproductive freedoms historically in Europe, and even more so Poland, as Poland has experienced extreme shifts in reproductive care access, and will serve as a focal point in the case study. To begin, in general, the criminalization of abortion is a prime feminist issue in the post socialist context. Throughout Eastern Europe nations have experienced many changes in abortion law as governments have disbanded and different political regimes have come into power. The Soviet Union was the first government to actually legalize abortion in Europe granting many access to reproductive care early on. It was not until the USSR dispersed that many lost the right to a legal abortion. When we examine, for example, Germany’s history of abortion access, we see a non-linear battle. Although political and social conversations on abortion were present since 1807 in Germany, changes in government forms throughout time made for diverse outcomes dependent on the time in history (Ferree, 2002).

For many years, even feminist movements in Germany supported the interference of the government in women’s reproduction in order to combat the suffering attributed to single-motherhood and dependence on men through marriage (Allen, 2003). Many radical and socialist feminist groups used eugenic theory in their arguments, claiming that undesirable births whether it be due to the social standing or health of the baby would be detrimental to the society as a whole as well as the parents (Allen, 2003). During this time, abortion was not often seen as the solution due to fear that it would lead to the sexual exploitation of women. Abstinence was the common method enforced until the German Bund fur Mutterschutz, a group of radical feminists, began to challenge this idea, advocating for abortion without restrictions in 1908 (Allen, 2003).

However, eugenic practices were particularly high in Nazi Germany following the sterilization law which enforced sterilization from the age of 14, and later expanded to forced abortion, for eugenic and medical reasons (Bock, 1996). Largely abortion was enforced for those who were considered to have “unworthy lives”, and prohibited for the purpose of preserving German vitality (Ferree, 2002).

Furthermore, Poland, a country of particular importance for this paper, has also not experienced a linear journey towards abortion access, but rather a reversal in their access to reproductive care. By this I mean that Polish citizens once had greater access to reproductive care, abortions in particular, than they do currently. This sentiment remains true even when examining the communist years. In Poland, in 1932, abortion was deemed legal under the conditions that the women’s health was at risk or the pregnancy was a result of incest or rape (Hussein et al., 2018). In 1956, these conditions expanded to social reasons such as “difficult living conditions”, essentially leaving it up to the pregnant individual to choose whether or not to carry out the pregnancy (Hussein et al., 2018). During this time, Polish doctors and physicians were not criminalized for performing abortions on their patients (Tella, 2023), and pregnant individuals were able to choose between private or public institutions to receive their reproductive care (Hussein et al., 2018).

After the fall of communism in 1989, Poland soon conformed to the influence of the Catholic church, and in 1993, the Law on Family Planning, Human Embryo Protection and Conditions of Permissibility of Abortion was passed. This law made it illegal for doctors or physicians to perform an abortion unless the pregnant person’s life was at risk, there was some sort of fetal abnormality, or the pregnancy occurred due to rape, sexual assault, or incest (Tella, 2023). However, this law remained as it was only for three years, because in 1996 it was amended to rid of the notion that life began at conception entirely, again allowing doctors and physicians to provide abortions under the previous conditions (Tella, 2023). In October 2020, Poland’s Constitutional Tribunal decided to eradicate this amendment, ruling that abortions are unconstitutional (Satre et al., 2021). The Tribunal ruling also put further restrictions in place, no longer permitting abortions in the case of fetal abnormalities (Satre et al., 2021). This has since remained unchanged.

Although the law technically allows for doctors and physicians to perform abortions that resulted from sexual assault or incest, or if the pregnant person may risk death, in reality this is not the case. Many doctors and physicians fear the legal repercussions that may come if a court were to decide that these conditions could not be proven. It is no surprise that sexual assault and rape can be difficult to be proven in a court of law due to stigma, sexism, etc., but it becomes even more difficult in abortion cases due to the risk that comes with ruling incorrectly. Moreover, doctors are even able to deny the right to an abortion by citing a conscience clause. Recently a 14-year-old with a mental disability was denied an abortion because the doctors in her village cited this conscience clause (Tilles, 2023). The girl became pregnant after being raped by her uncle, meeting two conditions for a legal abortion, rape and incest, but she was still forced to travel to Warsaw to see a doctor who would agree to perform the abortion (Tilles, 2023). Even if the reason is cited as risk towards the pregnant individual's life, there is still hesitancy to perform the operation due to fear of repercussions, especially now since the fetal abnormality condition has been removed. This has been observed in extreme cases, where doctors will wait for the fetus to be declared officially dead before agreeing to operate on a pregnant individual, even if it is clear from the start that the fetus has no chance of surviving (Tilles, 2022). Although the exact number is unknown due to lack of proper reporting, this has resulted in the deaths of multiple women, some of which have died from sepsis (Tilles, 2022).

### 2.3 Cross-Border Abortions

As a result, many Polish individuals are left with no choice but to leave Poland to receive an abortion. Cross-border abortions can be extremely costly and come with added complications related to travel. In researching cross-country abortion travel to England and Wales, Garnsey et al. (2021) surveyed 97 participants who sought abortion at three participating BPAS clinics from abroad. Participants were asked about their motivation to travel cross-country for the abortion and what their experience entailed (Garnsey et al., 2021). This research also revealed just how costly cross-border abortions can be. Results indicate that almost seventy percent of participants spent between 101-1000 euros on travel costs alone (Garnsey et al., 2021). In addition to the travel costs, the abortion itself was reported to cost over 500 euros for seventy-five percent of the



participants. Half of the participants also indicated that their travel was somewhat or very difficult (Garnsey et al., 2021).

Furthermore, cross-border abortions exemplify that reproductive rights are an international issue (Palmer, 2011). Even individuals who lived in countries where abortion was not totally restricted have had to travel for the procedure. For instance, even after the 1986-9 Criminal Code amendment in Canada was passed, many Canadians had to travel to the United States to receive their abortion (Palmer, 2011). Under this new law, Canadians were only able to receive abortions after approval from a hospital's therapeutic abortion committee (TAC) which consisted of three doctors who made their decision based on whether the pregnancy would harm the mother physically or psychologically (Palmer, 2011). This stripped pregnant people from their body autonomy and gave all power to a condensed group of doctors to make a life-altering decision. In order to combat this, Canadians traveled to the United States in large numbers to receive reproductive care despite it being "legal" in their home country.

In general, people who are pregnant travel for abortion services for a number of reasons. Of course, when individuals are traveling from countries with abortion bans, they are traveling out of extreme necessity, as it is impossible to get an abortion from a medical professional legally. However, a surprising number of people actually travel from countries where abortion is legal to a certain extent. This is because often even countries with more liberal abortion policies, there are strict gestational age limits that must be adhered to. This means that in a lot of countries where abortion is legal, the process can only be carried out before the fetus reaches a certain maturity. After the gestational age is reached, the abortion can no longer be performed legally in said country.

This restriction poses many difficulties for pregnant people globally. Many pregnant people do not discover that they are pregnant until past the specific gestational age of the fetus, leaving no possibility for a legal abortion in their home country. Others may not have decided on if abortion is the right choice for them until it is too late. Additionally, gestational age limits can be extremely restricting when services are not widely accessible and/or available. If appointments are not able to be made quickly due to lack of providers or high demand, it is very possible that a

pregnant person would miss their window of opportunity for an abortion before the limit is reached.

In studying cross-border abortion travel to the UK, the Netherlands, and Spain from other European countries, De Zordo et al. (2021) found that gestational age limits were the primary reason for abortion-related travel in a sample of over 200 people. Interviews with thirty of the participants revealed that eighteen people learned they were pregnant only after passing the legal gestational limit in their home country, due to factors such as irregular periods, misinformation from health professionals, and lack of signs of pregnancy (De Zordo et al., 2021). Five of the interviewees found out that they were pregnant before the gestational age limit was reached, but were unable to find adequate care in time due to lack of information and/or available services (De Zordo et al., 2021). Surprisingly, three of the participants were given incorrect facts about the gestational age of the fetus from their actual healthcare provider, resulting in an inability to have the abortion by the time they made the decision (De Zordo et al., 2021).

#### 2.4 Abortion Referral Networks

To begin, Ignaiuk and Sethna (2020) argue that women's reproductive agency should not only be studied in relation to fertility treatments and reproductive technologies, but also in regard to one's reproductive desires. This would include restrictive laws and policies that constrain abortion access globally, as well as other factors such as physical distance (Ignaiuk & Sethna, 2020). Research shows that with sufficient organization and mobilization, individuals are able to successfully avoid some of these limits by travelling locally and transnationally (Ignaiuk & Sethna, 2020). Historically, one factor that greatly increased people's transnational reproductive agency is the introduction of abortion referral networks (Ignaiuk & Sethna, 2020).

Abortion referral networks have long helped people gain access to abortions by providing information that allowed them to overcome "legal, geographical and logistical obstacles" (Ignaiuk & Sethna, 2020, p. 287). One of the first accounts of abortion referral networks comes from research conducted by Leslie J. Reagan who studied the Association to Repeal Abortion Laws located in California (Ignaiuk & Sethna, 2020). This association described as a "feminist

public health agency” was one of the first to provide American women with information regarding abortion providers in Mexico (Ignaiuk & Sethna, 2020). Mexico was accessible for many living in the south of the United States and provider cheaper options for the procedure. Although the Association to Repeal Abortion Laws was located in California, this initiative was followed by many others across the country. For example, the Clergy Consultation Service was formed in New York and Chicago, and the Abortion Birth Control Referral Service was established by the YMCA of the University of Washington (Ignaiuk & Sethna, 2020).

However, the United States was also an abortion destination for some. Because abortion laws in United States are established state by state, certain states became popular to visit for Canadian residents seeking a legal abortion (Palmer, 2011). In 1970, the Calgary Birth Control Association (CBCA) was founded by “twenty dedicated, overworked and extremely vocal women” (Palmer, 2011, p. 643). The CBCA was a local organization that assisted women with organizing their abortion and travel to the United States for abortions when the Canadian health-care system was unable or unwilling to provide this reproductive care (Palmer, 2011). The CBCA established this cross-border referral service in 1970 stating,

Alberta women definitely are leaving the country to obtain legal abortions in California, New York and England where permission is easy to obtain and private facilities are quickly available, but expensive. We suspect [that]... at least twenty women leave Alberta every week, spending up to a thousand dollars (which is often borrowed) in medical and hospital fees and travelling expenses (Palmer, 2011, p. 641).

In studying this phenomenon, the travels were described as “lonely, tragic, but legally necessary pilgrimages” (Palmer, 2011, p. 638). Although CBCA helped to facilitate these pilgrimages, only individuals who were financially capable benefited, as the travel expenses and procedure itself were costly and expected to be paid by the client (Palmer, 2011). Records from the CBCA showcase that individual’s experiences differed according to their sociodemographic characteristics such as gender, race, class, etc. (Palmer, 2011). However, the CBCA was unique in that they did not align themselves with feminism or radical politics in an attempt to not

alienate their clients. They instead focused their mission purely on abortion accessibility, and worked within certain political and social boundaries (Palmer, 2011).

From these examples it is clear that abortion referral networks were beneficial only to people who had the means to make the pilgrimage or those who were willing to suffer through it. They were largely information providers who were able to provide some details regarding a country or states laws, and possibly direct an individual to a particular clinic. Although helpful for some, abortion referral networks were not always inclusive as their services did not offer direct aid. The cost of the abortion procedure and the travel were needed to be paid by the individual seeking care. This offered a solution only for those who were financially able.

## 2.5 Abortion Organizing Groups

There are a number of non-profit organizations that specifically operate to aid women and other individuals seeking a safe abortion in more direct ways. For ease, I will be referring to these groups as abortion organizing groups. While many of these organizations still provide hotlines, and spread useful information, they also have been known to directly provide abortion pills and/or provide funding for cross-border abortions. Feminist groups organizing abortion trips is not a particularly new event. Although we likely do not have all proper records of this activism, it has existed for quite some time. As early as 1975, in public protest of a Women's Center in Frankfurt getting raided, bus trips to the Netherlands were arranged by feminist organizations for those seeking abortions (Ferree, 2002).

Moreover, Women On Waves is a Dutch non-profit that has been active in international reproductive justice since 1999 (Bisgaier, 2019). They have served as an informational and practical resource for those seeking abortions. Specifically, they have worked towards providing women with access to safe abortions and reproductive healthcare information (Bisgaier, 2019). They have held workshops and trainings all around the world, and have created additional hotlines and mobile applications as well (Bisgaier, 2019). Women on Waves also works to raise awareness about the various restrictive abortion laws that exist in other countries (Bisgaier, 2019), which in turn increases activism and general support.

The mechanisms that Women on Waves have used in order to meet their goals are fascinating. The organization is most known for their ship campaigns, in which ships dock on the shores of countries with restrictive abortion laws, and then sail twelve miles from the coastline in order to give people medical abortion pills in international waters (Bisgaier, 2019). They have also utilized artificial intelligence to deliver abortion pills by robot and drone (Bisgaier, 2019). While these grander abortion missions have gained much attention and press for Women on Waves, as previously mentioned, they also work to spread information digitally so that individuals can become knowledgeable on how to obtain a safe abortion. Often the press, even when it concerns a “failed” mission due to governmental interference, generates a larger response online. For instance, following much of the press from Guatemala’s resistance to Women on Waves, over sixty women called the hotline for assistance in just two days (Bisgaier, 2019).

Furthermore, in 2019, Abortion Without Borders, an initiative that works to ensure that individuals in Poland with limited access to reproductive care can still receive abortions, was formed (Abortion Without Borders, 2019). This initiative spans across Europe, encompassing six groups which help arrange in-clinic abortions or provide abortion pills (Abortion Support Network [ASN], 2022). They also work to reduce stigma around abortion and offer an informational hotline to help those in need. Additionally, Abortion Without Borders offers emotional support by offering the ability to talk with a therapist or psychologist while making the decision to terminate the pregnancy or not (Abortion Without Borders, 2019). In their first year of operating they received 5,237 calls from Polish people, and nearly 32,000 in their second-year (Abortion Without Borders, 2019). They have provided financial compensation of over 200,000 euros to secure abortions from arranging travel to the abortion itself (Abortion Without Borders, 2019).

Their services are offered to individuals who contact them via email or phone. They are mainly supporting people in Poland who are forced to adhere to the restrictive abortion laws there. In order to receive travel information, financial help, or any other service offered, those in need can contact the hotline which is operated by one of member groups of Abortion Without Borders, KOBIECY W SIECI (Abortion Without Borders, 2019). After first contact via phone or email,

the individual will be put into contact with one of the additional groups which are currently a part of initiative dependent on their need or location. These groups are Abortion Support Network, Abortion Network Amsterdam, Women Help Women, Abortion Dream Team, and Ciocia Basia (ASN, 2022).

To briefly describe the organizations that are apart of Abortion Without Borders, Abortion Support Network (ASN) is a UK based charity organization that offers abortion access support, assisting individuals from Poland, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Malta, Isle of Man, Gibraltar, the Czech Republic, Romania, Hungary, France, Spain, and other countries within the EU depending on one's specific circumstances (ASN, 2022). ASN provides contact information for trusted abortion pill providers, clinic information, accommodation, travel information, and financial help when available and needed (ASN, 2022). ASN was established in 2009 and is currently made up of both staffed employees and volunteers. They have published an annual report each year detailing their operation, fundraising, achievements and plans for the future (ASN, 2022).

Abortion Network Amsterdam (ANA), as the name suggests, operates in the Netherlands where abortion is legal up until the 23rd week of pregnancy, the latest gestational period in the EU (Abortion Network Amsterdam [ANA], 2023). The group is made up of volunteers and are funded by donations. In 2022, they were able to assist 588 clients and arrange 260 abortions (ANA, 2023). ANA offers support to people globally however their main users are from Poland. On their website they provide a full list of options and specific clinics available depending on the week of pregnancy (ANA, 2023). They outline all personal information needed in case you would like them to schedule an appointment for you, and offer financial help if needed (ANA, 2023).

Women Help Women (WHW) state that, "feminist activism, human rights, reproductive justice and harm reduction are the foundations for our work to improve access and change social norms and the discourse around abortion" (Women Help Women [WHW], n.d., p. 344). They are a non-profit organization made up of many different teams in over 15 countries which include counselors, medical professionals, media specialists, researchers, scientific advisors, and feminist activists (WHW, n.d., p. 428). As previously mentioned, WHW work with Abortion Without

Borders to assist with “self-managed abortion” by providing abortion pills in areas where abortion is restricted (WHW, n.d., p. 428). They partner with other feminist groups around the world to increase offerings of abortion pills and contraceptives, and hold a global telehealth service that can be called when seeking abortion pills, support, or general information (WHW, n.d., p. 346). On their website, they also provide a pregnancy calculator that can help individuals calculate how far a long in their pregnancy they are and determine if abortion pills are a viable option. In addition to providing abortion pills they also offer trainings for other feminist organizations, project coordination, research paper collaboration, and much more (WHW, n.d., p. 348).

Aborcynjny Dream Team, or Abortion Dream Team, is an initiative based in Poland that was established in 2016 (Abortion Dream Team, 2023). They later joined Abortion Without Borders in 2019. Abortion Dream Team describe themselves as “an informal initiative aimed at normalizing abortion” who “want to talk about abortion freely, without taboos, without drama, without lies, without fear” (Abortion Dream Team, 2023). Despite the possible risks, they advocate for abortion within Poland, sharing information about abortion pills and other abortion methods. Their goal to is to share useful information and positive abortion experiences in order to fight the stigma associated with abortion in Poland and break the silence (Abortion Dream Team, 2023). To achieve this, they organize meetings and storytelling sessions, create material on social media, and cooperate with other organizations all around the world (Abortion Dream Team, 2023). Individuals in need of an abortion are able to review legal options on their website along with extensive details about each option. For example, on one webpage you are able to read about the time frame abortion pills can be used in, preparation required, side effects, when to go to a doctor, what happens after, when to take another pregnancy test, etc. (Abortion Dream Team, 2023). They also offer contact information for other feminist organizations in case an in-clinic operation is needed, as well as country specific regulations (Abortion Dream Team, 2023).

In an attempt to secure funding Abortion Dream Team advertises that they help to perform 94 abortions a day, helping over 40,000 people each year (Abortion Dream Team, 2023). Still, Abortion Dream Team must abide by Polish law, and in normal circumstances do not directly order or provide abortion pills for those who contact them. However, in 2020, one member of

Abortion Dream Team, Justyna Wydrzyńska, was charged with aiding an abortion after sending her own abortion pills to a woman in need (International Planned Parenthood Federation, 2023). Although not illegal to take an abortion pill to end your own pregnancy, aiding in abortion while in Poland can be deemed criminal. Ania, the woman Justyna helped, was in an abusive relationship with her husband who previously restricted her from traveling to Germany to undergo an abortion procedure. Ania was not able to rely on the abortion pills being sent from a provider through the mail due to the postal service delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (International Planned Parenthood Federation, 2023).

Ania turned to Abortion Without Borders where Justyna learned of her story and made the decision to help Ania directly. Anias husband was extremely controlling, monitoring her search history and messages, and after discovering the package that Justyna had sent, he called the police. In the end Ania did not actually take the pills and instead miscarried a few days later (Abortion Dream Team, 2023). The charging of Justyna sparked nationwide protests, leading to the popularity of the hashtag #iamjustyna or #JakJustyna, in order to share solidarity with Justyna and send the message that you would do the same (Abortion Dream Team, 2023). After a grueling legal battle, in March of 2023, Justyna was found guilty of assisting in obtaining an abortion by the District Court in Warsaw, and was sentenced to eight months of community service, becoming the first woman in Europe to be convicted of aiding an abortion (International Planned Parenthood Federation, 2023).

## 2.6 The Ciocia Collectives

### 2.6.1 Ciocia Basia

The final organization which is a part of Abortion Without Borders is Ciocia Basia, which is one of the three collectives which my case study will focus on. My research will include Ciocia Basia, Ciocia Wienia, and Ciocia Czesia. They are a group of distinct collectives that help individuals who live in Poland gain access to safe abortions. The name is Polish, with Ciocia translating to auntie, and Basia, Wienia, and Czesia indicating common Polish names for women that sound similar to the cities or countries that the organizations are located. Specifically, Ciocia Basia is located in Berlin, Germany, Ciocia Wienia is located in Vienna, Austria, and Ciocia



Czesia is located in Prague, Czech Republic. I have also seen suggestions that this collective exists in Munich, Frankfurt, and possibly other nearby cities, but the most active online are located in Berlin, Vienna, and Prague. Although sharing a name and supporting one another online via social media platforms, each organization operates independently from one another.

Ciocia Basia or Auntie Barbara is quite well-known and is one of six organizations that are a part of Abortion without Borders. Ciocia Basia is available as a resource for people who contact Abortion Without Borders as a larger network. Ciocia Basia is not one of the organizations that provides abortion pills to those in need, but instead will help organize abortion procedures in Berlin and occasionally other cities in Germany (Ciocia Basia, n.d.). They are ready to help with translations, locating accommodations, arranging appointments at the clinics, and supporting the individual financially when needed (Ciocia Basia, n.d.). They have previously described themselves as an informal queer feminist collective that supports people from all over, but most commonly Poland, with accessing abortions safely (Ciocia Basia, 2016). They largely rely on donations and will sometimes organize gofundme campaigns to help raise money.

Accommodations offered to individuals going to Berlin to receive care are often in the homes of Ciocia Basia volunteers. They do not profit financially from their services (Ciocia Basia, n.d.)

Under a drawing of members gathering in a living room, a Ciocia Basia Facebook photo from 2016 states,

We are an independent and not commercial group based in Berlin. We believe that each woman has a right to choose how her life should look like and what should happen to her body. Therefore we support women in Poland (and other places where abortion on demand is not available) to get an abortion. We cooperate with a clinic and a consultant. Additionally, we offer free translation from and to Polish whenever necessary, we accompany the women to/in the clinic and organize free of charge places to sleep. Ciocia Basia does not charge anything. We act due to our feminist beliefs, and we are motivated by solidarity among women and will to help people whose rights are being broken. We

consider the access to safe abortion on demand as one of the basic human rights. Contact [ciocia.basia@riseup.net](mailto:ciocia.basia@riseup.net), +49 15210385680.

### 2.6.2 Ciocia Wienia

Endearingly, Ciocia Wienia is said to be the sister of Auntie Basia. Similarly to Ciocia Basia, Ciocia Wienia describe themselves as an informal group of feminist activists that support people from Poland and elsewhere access abortions in Austria (Ciocia Wienia, 2021). They are clear in that they assist all individuals who are dealing with an un/wanted pregnancy including cis women, non-binary people, transgender people, etc. regardless of legal status or citizenship (Ciocia Wienia, 2021). They provide important information on reproductive rights and abortion in Austria specifically. They will assist those in need with arranging private accommodation in a volunteer's apartment, translation at the hospital, pick-up in Vienna, and the scheduling of the abortion procedure (Ciocia Wienia, 2021). When possible they will also provide financial support when an individual is unable to pay for the abortion itself (Ciocia Wienia, 2021).

Ciocia Wienia also specify that they are able to assist with anonymous birth as it is free and legal to do in any Austrian hospital (Ciocia Wienia, 2021). In Austria, you are able to receive prenatal care, transportation to the hospital via ambulance, and medical care for yourself and the baby completely anonymously and free of charge. You do not have to be an Austrian citizen or resident, nor do you have to have health insurance from Austria. (Ciocia Wienia, 2021). After giving birth the child is taken by Child Protective Services and cared for by foster parents (Ciocia Wienia, 2021). Giving birth anonymously is completely legal in Austria so the parent will not be subject to any sort of criminal prosecution or be held responsible for the care of the child (Ciocia Wienia, 2021). Additionally, the parent has 6 months from giving birth to change their mind and apply to become the legal guardian of the child (Ciocia Wienia, 2021). Ciocia Wienia will assist with every step of this process, they will accompany pregnant individuals to the hospital, translate from German to Polish or English, arrange doctor appointments, and of course arrange accommodation (Ciocia Wienia, 2021).

Ciocia Wienia speaks English, Polish, and German and offer their website in all 3 languages. Importantly, on their website they provide guidance on the different methods of abortion offered at different stages of the pregnancy and the amount of time it will take. At the 5-9-week mark, Ciocia Wienia recommends the pharmacological method, in which Mifepristone and Misoprostal are given at the clinic. These same pharmaceuticals can be ordered online from Women Help Women, and can be taken at home, so it is not always necessary to stay in Vienna for long (Ciocia Wienia, 2021). If you are 6-14 weeks pregnant, it is recommended to undergo the vacuum aspiration procedure. Ciocia Wienia offers information about the procedure, the anesthesia necessary, and the amount of time you will need to spend at the clinic to have this done. After this period, you must travel elsewhere to terminate the pregnancy (Ciocia Wienia, 2021). They advise that you can travel to the Netherlands up to the 22<sup>nd</sup> week by contacting Abortion Network Amsterdam, or up to the 24<sup>th</sup> week in the UK by contacting Abortion Support Network (Ciocia Wienia, 2021).

In Austria, the abortion procedure, whether pharmacological or surgical, is somewhat costly, costing between 535 and 560 for pharmacological, and 550 and 915 for surgical (Ciocia Wienia, 2021). However, Ciocia Wienia discloses that they work with clinics that offer the lowest prices in Vienna, and will help financially when possible (Ciocia Wienia, 2021). All abortions are done privately and again do not require Austrian residency or Austrian health insurance (Ciocia Wienia, 2021). Ciocia Wienia also has an ongoing gofundme where they have raised nearly 32,000 euros since October 2020 (Ciocia Wienia, 2021).

### 2.6.3 Ciocia Czesia

Ciocia Czesia, deriving from the Polish name Czesław, was established November 5th, 2020 (Krizova, 2021). It is largely inspired by Ciocia Basia and Ciocia Wienia, and they also consider themselves to be an informal collective. Ciocia Czesia started with a group of mostly Polish women who met online and are living in the Czech Republic (Krizova, 2021). It was founded by Jolanta Nowaczyk and others following new restrictions on abortion in Poland (Walker & Koslerova, 2020). Because Ciocia Czesia is not a non-profit, the collective receives their funding from solely donations and are not able to apply for other forms of support such as grants (Ciocia

Czesia, n.d.). Those who are apart of Ciocia Czesia are all volunteers, so none of the money from fundraising goes towards anything besides support for those in need of help. They have raised money through donations, t-shirt sales, print sales, tattoo artists and more (Ciocia Czesia, n.d.)

In an interview with a2larm, a volunteer said that they are quite similar to Ciocia Basia and Wienia; however, there are differences in the laws in the Czech Republic. For instance, in the Czech Republic pregnancies can be terminated up until the 24<sup>th</sup> week in certain cases (Krizova, 2021). Still, similarly to Ciocia Basia and Wienia, Ciocia Czesia provides funding, translation services, funding, and more to pregnant people in Poland who are unable to get abortions (Walker & Koslerova, 2020). They also provide emotional support and encouragement when needed (Krizova, 2021). In an interview with the Guardian, Nowaczyk states, “Each case is different: someone might need advice about which clinic to turn to, while others need financing and help with arranging the entire procedure” (Walker & Koslerova, 2020). Ciocia Czesia also has a website that covers the procedure extensively however it is only available in Polish language. The website explains the legality of abortion in the Czech Republic, how to prepare for the procedure, the procedure itself, and what to do after. They also share stories from individuals who have travelled to the Czech Republic for an abortion, and their experience with it and receiving support from Ciocia Czesia (Ciocia Czesia, n.d.).

The collective has faced some resistance from clinics within the Czech Republic, stating that certain clinics would turn away individuals who were not considered residents in the Czech Republic (Krizova, 2021). Although it seems there has been confirmation from the ministry of health that individuals from other EU countries can in fact receive an abortion in the Czech Republic, the law appears to have two different interpretations that impact whether or not the clinic will agree to the procedure (Krizova, 2021). Nevertheless, Ciocia Czesia is a new organization that is already doing tremendous work to aid in cross-border abortions and provide reproductive care to pregnant people in Poland. Within five weeks of opening the organization was able to assist ten Polish people with abortions (Walker & Koslerova, 2020). In 2021 alone the collective spent 13, 324 euros to support pregnant people who were financially unable to get their abortion, and they were contacted by 861 people for help (Ciocia Czesia, n.d.).

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### 3.1 Research Questions

While much research exists on the individuals who travel abroad to receive reproductive care, there has been little in-depth research on the organizations that assist in this process.

Organizations of different kinds have been helping people travel transnationally for decades in order to obtain safe abortions, saving people's lives in the process. In order to highlight the current work that these organizations do and be able to provide information on their struggles and needs, I will be conducting interviews with Ciocia Basia, Ciocia Wienia, and Ciocia Czesia as part of a case study. Through my research, I hope to answer the following questions:

1. What can the work the Ciocia collectives do tell us about reproductive justice and activism in Central Europe?
2. In what ways do Ciocia Basia, Ciocia Wienia, and Ciocia Czesia demonstrate the potential for feminist solidarity?

### 3.2 Positionality

Before explaining the specifics of the methodology I have chosen, I believe it is important to disclose why I have chosen the Ciocia network specifically, the significance these collectives hold for me, and my own positionality in all of this. To begin, I was raised in a low to middle class family in the south of the United States. I am a White, 25-year-old, cisgender woman. It is important to recognize that I, as a White woman, will be conducting research on other, mostly White women, despite the reproductive justice movement being pioneered by women of color. I ask myself, 'how do I adequately address this?', and come back unsure. I hope that paying homage to them and recognizing their efforts will be close to enough.

I have been living in the Czech Republic in the city of Prague for 2 years getting my master's degree in Gender Studies and working multiple jobs. I was first exposed to Ciocia Czesia through a friend who invited me a fundraising event, and later through their social media

platforms. I initially began my thesis with the intention of focusing solely on Ciocia Czesia as they were the only group I was aware of. It was not until later in the process that I discovered the existence of the additional Ciocia collectives located in Berlin and Vienna. This discovery only peaked my interest more, as I began to wonder about the collaboration that could be occurring between these groups which share a name and are based in cities in relatively close proximity to one another.

Moreover, I would like to address my level of emotional investment in this research and the topic in general. To provide some context, I am a pro-choice feminist and activist who is deeply impassioned about the struggle for reproductive justice. This feeling has more recently been heightened due to the attack on reproductive rights in many areas of the world. My personal viewpoint is that it is that it is your body, your choice, and no one under any circumstances should be forced to give birth. I am also of Polish descent, making the tribunal decision an issue that weighs heavily on my heart. Nearly half of my family is living in Poland, many of whom are women who have had their reproductive autonomy stripped from them. In a sense, I see myself in the individuals the collectives are offering aid to, and think about how I could have been in this exact situation had my mother not chosen to move to the United States before I was born.

At the same time, there is a major attack on reproductive freedom in my home country, as the Supreme Courts vote to overturn *Roe v. Wade* was leaked to the public at the time of my research and eventually solidified. I feel a sense of guilt that I am in the Czech Republic during such a trying time, unable to attend the protests and fight this ruling in my home country. Being from Florida, a largely conservative state with a Republican Governor, I am wary of the introduction of bills with tighter and tighter abortions restrictions. I am distressed thinking about the country that I may one day return to, and fear for the lives of my close friends and family. For these reasons, I am cautiously aware of my potential bias and ability to overlook certain factors, as I actively admire the work the collectives are doing.

There were a number of other potential issues I pondered over before conducting my research. For full transparency, and to get a better understanding of my thoughts going into the interview, I will briefly discuss them now. To start, my intention going into this research project was to

conduct positive research. I made this intention explicit whenever asked about my reasoning for choosing this topic. As I explained to others and I will now explain here, when determining my area of research, I found it difficult to think of anything other than the tribunal decision in Poland and abortion access globally. I felt deeply sad, and even more so angry that this was happening.

Because of this, I knew I would have to write my thesis on something related to abortion access or reproductive justice generally. Still, the thought of spending the next few years focused on something I found so disheartening worried me. I wanted to actually enjoy my research while conducting it; and moreover, avoid producing yet another, but valid, piece of feminist academic writing that detailed the horrors that abortion restrictions brought. It was clear that the tribunal ruling in Poland was horrible and would cause immense suffering, even death. However, rather than expand on this fact, I sought after something that had the potential to evoke hope for myself and possibly others.

With this intention in mind, I considered the possibility of uncovering negative aspects of the organizations and worried about how I might handle this situation. In case there would be something problematic about their operation, or anything seemingly undesirable, I would struggle with how and if I should include it in my analysis. Although I worried about unexpected discoveries that may not depict the organizations in the best light, I have an obligation to produce research that is truthful. I also have concerns about my decision to inquire about the working of the organizations while also incorporating more personal questions into the interview. For instance, I have decided to ask what inspires the interviewee to work with the collective and other personal opinions. While it may complicate the analysis more, I believe it will also enrich the thesis and make it more inspiring for those who read it.

### 3.3 Research Design: Deciding on Methodology

As previously mentioned, for my research I have chosen to do a case study on Ciocia Basia, Wienia, and Czesia. By providing a focused case study I believe I will be able to uncover some of the more nuanced difficulties these organizations endure, as well as gain valuable information about what organizations that assist with cross-border abortions need. Speaking with the Ciocia

collectives will also provide insight into the various legal hoops organizations have to go through when crossing international borders and some of the specific obstacles unique to their individual countries. Before committing I reached out to each collective via email to ask if they would be willing to participate in my research. In making my request, I made sure to completely self-disclose who I am and what I study, as well as reveal the purpose of my research. I approached the collectives from a personal standpoint, revealing my admiration for the organization and the work that they do, as well as my closeness to the research being half-Polish and an advocate for reproductive rights. In doing so I maximized the vulnerability of me as a researcher and reformulated my role (Reinharz, 1992).

In order to allow for flexibility, I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews contain some questions which were predetermined, and others that are created on the spot during the interview (Ryan et al., 2009). This was a simple decision that required little contemplation when designing my methodology. I needed an interviewing style that was structured enough so that the interviewees got a sense that I was familiar with the subject, but flexible enough so that they felt they had the ability to discuss what they felt was important. I hoped that the interviewees would feel comfortable enough to discuss what they wanted to in order to get a sense of what they felt passionate about. At the same time, I did not want to go into the interview without any predetermined questions out of fear that it would appear as if I was unprepared or lacked knowledge of their operation entirely. I also did not want to put too much pressure on the interviewees to lead the interview; however, as I could not anticipate what would be discussed, a fully structured interview was not an option.

Before starting each interview, I presented the interviewee with an informed consent form which can be found in Appendix A. Each participant was given ample time to read the document privately and was informed to ask any questions before they had before signing it. The contents of the informed consent form included the Thesis title, Institution, Researcher, Purpose of the study, Interview procedure, Voluntary participation, and Confidentiality. The purpose of this was to disclose the reasoning for the study, outline how the interview would be structured, inform participants that the interview would be recorded and transcribed, and assure them that participation was completely voluntarily and that they had the ability to pause or stop the



interview at any time, as well as retract or revise their answers. The informed consent form also disclosed that their names would be changed, and the transcriptions or recordings would not be shared with outside sources. Lastly, at the end of the document I provided my contact information in case of questions or concerns, as well as my thesis advisors name and email address in case they had a question they did not feel comfortable to ask me directly.

When sitting down with each interviewee, I started but expressing my desire for the interview to be a “true dialogue” rather than an “interrogation” (Reinharz, 1992, 33). Each time I showed that I had a general overview of questions to keep me on track, but asked that they stop me at any time to discuss any topics which they felt were important or issues that were passionate about. However, at the same time, I was careful to avoid misleading the interviewee into thinking of this interaction as a completely casual conversation. Regardless of how relaxed I want the conversation to feel, the truth is that there is an ever-present power imbalance that is occurring as we speak. I am asking them to disclose intimate details of their operation for the benefit of my own research. Although my hope would be that this research would be of some use to them in the future, currently I am the one benefiting from their volunteered time and disclosure. Additionally, once the interview is over, I have the potential to do anything I want with their answers, including misinterpreting what they say or conducting an incorrect analysis. Because of these factors, I as the researcher was in a clear position of power, and did not aim to misrepresent myself as anything other.

### 3.3.1 Planning the Interview

My goal when planning each interview was to meet in person and have verbal conversation. Although email interviewing may be less threatening for the interviewee (Meho, 2006) (Ryan et al., 2009), it would not have allowed for the flexibility my research requires. I preferred to conduct the interview in person, face to face, in order to make the interaction feel more natural and conversational. This way I would also be able to interpret non-verbal cues by observing the interviewees body language and facial expressions more clearly (Ryan et al., 2009). This would likely increase my understanding of the conversation and lead me to modify the questions as I went through. My hope was to choose a café in the city that was relatively quiet as well as

private to have the interview, to optimize sound quality and limit distractions. Due to the close proximity of Berlin and Vienna to Prague, I offered and was willing to travel to both locations in order to have the interview. However, Ciocia Wienia expressed that they had a preference to meet online, so I agreed to accommodate this. In the end, two of the interviews were conducted in person, and one of the interviews was conducted online via a video chat on Google Meet.

Furthermore, I had a difficult choice to make when deciding whether to conduct individual or group interviews. There were pros and cons to each style which I considered when making my decision. With group interviews I would have the opportunity to speak with multiple members of the Ciocia collectives at the same time. This would allow for differing opinions to arise simultaneously and with that, possibly more complexity. However, I believed this might have also put pressure on the participants, as they would have to answer each question with their colleagues present and listening. In an individual interview, I would be able to take some of this pressure away, and also give one person my undivided attention. For these reasons, one-on-one interviews can often be more interactive and fluid (Letherby, 2003).

However, because my aim was to learn more about the collective as a whole, as well as individual motivations, ultimately I decided that a group interview would be best. Although this was my desire going into the interview process, in the end this outcome was not achieved. Despite sharing that a group interview would be ideal, many members of the collectives were too busy to participate. Because of this, my interview style ended up being mixed method. I conducted a group interview with two members of Ciocia Basia, and individual interviews separately with Ciocia Wienia and Ciocia Czesia. Although unplanned, this difference added a layer of complexity to the interviews which will be further discussed later.

### 3.3.2 Interview Structure and Questions

I entered each interview with a guide containing 8 sections loosely divided by topic which can be found in Appendix B. The sections were titled *General/Icebreaker*, *Abortion Mission*, *Obstacles*, *Legal Details*, *Organization*, *Collaboration*, *Personal Motivation*, and *Closing*. Although a few questions were gradually added after finishing an interview, in the end, the last interview

contained 3-8 questions per section, coming to a total of 36 questions. The select questions which I did predetermine were based on a few things. Firstly, my aim was to gather as much detail as possible in order to adequately depict the role Ciocia Basia, Wienia, and Czesia are playing in the fight for reproductive care in Poland. Although I already had a basic understanding of each collective, I wanted to give the opportunity for them to self-describe and introduce themselves to me.

For this reason, I started with a general/icebreaker section which asked each interviewee about their role within the group, the length of time they have been involved with the collective, and asked them to describe what the collective is generally. My hope in beginning with these questions was that it would provide the interviewee with a sense of confidence in their knowledge of the subject, so they would feel more at ease as we moved towards questions without such a simple answer. Following this line of thinking, the subsequent section revolved around the abortion missions, i.e. what an abortion mission entailed, how they are organized, and who they benefit. After laying the groundwork, the next section inquired about obstacles each collective has faced, giving the opportunity for everyone to answer naturally, and then inquiring directly about the COVID-19 pandemic and war in Ukraine. I also planned to address any resistance the collectives may have faced, and asked questions to learn about what they needed most in terms of resources. Put simply, I wanted to know what their biggest problems were.

Sticking to the subject of obstacles, the interview then flowed to the legal aspect of their operation and asked about any legal issues they may have run into or fear they may run into in the future. Specifically, I was eager to engage in a dialogue about Justyana Wydrzynska, a member of Abortion Dream Team, who was charged with aiding in abortion after giving an abortion pill to another woman in Poland. Although the Ciocia collectives are not carrying out their operation in Poland, I was still curious to know what this case revealed for each collective and if it had any impact on how they worked at all. The next section was about organization. This was perhaps one of the most interesting sections for me personally, as I found myself extremely intrigued with the interworking of each collective. I asked about the number of members, roles, hierarchy, how to become a member, necessary training, and overall formality or lack of.

This led to the collaboration section which focused on collaboration between the Ciocia collectives. Before conducting the interviews this was a great mystery, as each group seemed to operate completely independently yet share a name. In addition to understanding how the collaboration worked, I also wondered about their satisfaction with these relationships, and if they had any ideas for potential improvement. I also inquired about their ties to larger abortion networks across the globe such as Abortion Without Borders. I was keen to ask why certain Ciocia collectives are a part of Abortion Without Borders while others are not.

The final two sections revolved around personal motivations for joining the collectives and general closing. Although the interview focused on the collective as a whole, I also wanted to learn as much as possible about the person I was actually interviewing. I had tasked them with the difficult job of representing the collective entirely, so for me it was important to gain somewhat of an understanding as to why they joined in the first place. Therefore, the personal motivations section asked directly about what inspired them to start working with the collective, and also asked if there had been any particularly difficult moments during their time. Based on their response to this answer, I then asked what motivated them to continue to do this work. The closing section consisted of a few predetermined wrap-up questions about what each collective had planned for the future, and ways outsiders could offer support in their country as well as abroad. Lastly, I dedicated time to cover any topic the interviewee thought was missed and wished to talk about, or anything they wanted to revisit in order to add or clarify previous points made.

### 3.3.3 The Interviews

The first interview I conducted was with Hana from Ciocia Wienia. As previously stated, this interview occurred over a Google Meet via a video call as this was the preference of Hana and the rest of the collective. Although I had suggested traveling to Vienna to meet in person with multiple members of the collective, Hana was the only member able to attend. She asked if it would be possible to forward the questions beforehand, to which I responded that I preferred to keep the interview flexible and ask questions as they arise. I did send her a list of topics I hoped

to cover and offered that if she felt more comfortable receiving the questions beforehand I would of course send them, but she replied that this was not necessary. The invitation was easily sent along with the informed consent form which she digitally signed and emailed back to me. We met in the late afternoon.

This first interview also served as my pilot interview. I did not have the opportunity to test out the questions before this moment, but revised them multiple times before going in. From this pilot interview, I was able to further modify my interview questions for the interview with Ciocia Basia, and then once more with Ciocia Czesia. I did not remove any questions after the pilot interview, but rather added the questions that arose naturally and I felt were important to include in the subsequent interviews. A few original questions were slightly adapted due to some confusion that arose as well. I also chose to rearrange the order of my questions based on my experience with the first interview undergoing some harsh changes in subject.

Although occurring online, the conversation flowed quite easily during the interview with Hana. I suspect this could be attributed to the commonality of video conferences in our post pandemic society. Moreover, one of the benefits of having this interview online was that there were no outside distractions. I was able to hear Hana clearly with no other people talking nearby or music playing in the background. I found that because of this I was able to concentrate much more on the interview itself and Hana was able to speak for longer. However, the online interview was the most formal of the three interviews, likely because we were not able to establish much of a rapport beforehand.

The interview with Ciocia Basia and Ciocia Wienia were both conducted in-person. I met with Ciocia Basia second out of the three after traveling to Berlin. Because I was not super familiar with the city I was hesitant to choose a location to meet initially. Although I had suggested one café which online reviews deemed suitable for working, it was on the other side of the city and therefore too far for Olivia and Beth. In the end we met at a café recommended by Olivia. I arrived at the café much earlier than we had planned due to my lack of familiarity to ensure it was suitable. Luckily, I was able to reserve the last available table inside; however unluckily it

was closest to the bar and the speaker. Because Olivia and Beth work during the day, it was necessary to meet in the evening.

The café was dim lit with candles flickering on every table and techno music was playing a bit loudly near the bar. I worried if my recording device would be able to clearly hear the audio but after doing a quick test run it seemed to work fine. Olivia and Beth arrived and sat side by side across from me. Despite the noise of the surrounding area we were able to clearly hear one another and record the session. The interview was almost immediately noticeably less formal than the Ciocia Wienia interview conducted online. I was able to build rapport with them both before starting to ask questions through ordering drinks, commenting on the space, the music, etc.

I was also able to build this same rapport with Jessica, the Ciocia Czesia member I interviewed. For this interview, I was able to choose a café I was already familiar with and knew had a semi-secluded corner to sit in. Although the thought had crossed my mind to conduct the interview in my home or at the faculty, I did not want to make Jessica feel as if she was a guest in my space. My choosing a neutral and public location I was able to create a more balanced environment that I believe was more beneficial for the interview as a whole. Unfortunately, my bad luck continued as we were joined by an extremely loud speaking individual who chose to sit at the only other table in this secluded corner. But because of the informal nature of the interview, we were able to laugh about it together.

Despite the distractions of being in a public space, the in-person interviews were enjoyable due to the informal nature and approachability of the interviewees. I worried that talking about abortions so openly and quite frankly loudly in a public space would make the interviewees feel uneasy, but there were no whispers or fear. The interruptions from wait staff were few, and eventually the loud talking man left. These two interviews were the longest, likely due their conversational feel. The interview with Ciocia Wienia online was the shortest of the three, but by far the most organized, which led to more concise answers. There were no distractions present, and as an interviewer I was easily able to keep track of which question I planned to ask next. I

believe this was a positive aspect, especially it being my first interview, as it gave me the confidence that I would be able to conduct the interview effectively and smoothly.

The differences between the group and individual interviews also created some notable dynamics. As previously mentioned, my hope when starting the process was that all three interviews would be group interviews. My initial ask of each collective was to meet with multiple members, however, the capacity of each collective was limited. Ciocia Basia was the only interview which was conducted in a group. I was first in contact with Olivia from Ciocia Basia who graciously reached out to all members to see who would have capacity to meet. In the end, one other member, Beth, agreed.

My impression is that the group dynamic relieved the interviewees of some of the pressure of answering questions. Multiple times during the conversation Olivia and Beth were able to turn to one another to confirm their answers or deflect to another if they were unsure or lacked a concrete opinion. I believe this boosted their overall confidence in the interview. It also made for a richer conversation, as at certain times one would bring up something the other completely overlooked, or had never even considered before. For instance, at one point when giving an overview of the abortion mission, which can be a quite lengthy process, Beth was able to add a very important piece that Olivia had initially forgotten in the moment. With so many different topics of varying complexity being discussed, it is not unusual that something could be missed. It was also interesting to hear one participant bring up a point that the other very much agreed with, but had never given thought to before. In these situations, I was able to see the realization in real time, which was quite fascinating.

However, the group style of interview also presented some challenges. Olivia was somewhat more vocal than Beth for parts of the interview. Olivia was often the first to speak up to answer a question, however did allow for Beth to speak at length whenever she chose to. The issue often came from my side, as Olivia's answer would peak my interest, causing me to immediately jump to follow-up questions, sparking an entirely new conversation. I recall a few times in which I did not return to the original question to ask for Beth's take or opinion. However, I did make note of my mistake during the interview and tried to self-correct in the second half. Alternatively, the

participants of the individual interviews were able to talk at length without interruption, but did have to rely completely on themselves and their own knowledge to provide answers. This seemed particularly overwhelming during my interview with Jessica of Ciocia Czesia, as she referred to the internet or social media multiple times to confirm her answers.

Additionally, although very minor, there were some moments of slight tension during the group Ciocia Basia interview. One instance occurred when discussing the level of safety each felt while organizing the abortions. Having studied the law quite extensively, Olivia felt confident that what they were doing is quite safe; however, Beth expressed that although what Olivia said was “relaxing”, she still had concerns. While this notion of safety will be elaborated on later in the text, what I would like to highlight here is the disagreement. Due to their difference in opinion, I wonder if either, but especially Beth, was hesitant to share their feelings fully. In a one-on-one setting, I believe we could have stayed on this topic for longer and heard the full extent of Beth’s concerns. In general, the level of comfort one feels while answering in front of their peer is questionable. Having the privacy to speak to someone one-on-one has the potential to lead to more personal and/or vulnerable disclosures. Still, this dynamic allowed for different perspectives to arise which was lacking in the individual interviews.

There were a few challenging moments during the interviews such as misunderstandings, awkward pauses, or harsh subject changes. One instance in particular that stuck with me the most occurred during the Ciocia Czesia interview with Jessica. At the very start of the interview Jessica disclosed to me the prior to joining the core team of Ciocia Czesia she was first involved with a different, but connected, project. After discussing it for some time, Jessica came to the realization that it may not have been a wise decision to share this information with me. To give some context, the project pertained to information which is deemed confidential. Jessica has asked me to remove the mention of this specific project, so I am unable to disclose any details, however I have chosen to mention the moment generally due to the significance it holds. Although from the start I tried to reassure Jessica that she could retract anything during or after the interview, I found myself feeling guilty for asking so many details of the project to begin with. I later realized that this feeling of guilt persisted during each interview the more that I pressed on specific questions related to their operation.



In certain moments, I was overcome with a sense of invasion, as if I was tiptoeing the line between questions that were appropriate to ask and questions which were not. Getting into the nitty gritty of an organization that is run so privately, I worried that it may be perceived as trying to “out them”, or undermine them in some way. As if me learning this information could allow me to tear down their network from the inside. Maybe it could. I find this internal response surprising as I expressed my reasoning for doing this research and the admiration I held for the collectives beforehand. Still, I found myself feeling as if I had to show that I was "on their side" due to the intricacy of my questions. As I asked every question I could not help but get the sense that some of these questions were things they had not been asked before. As the participants expressed in almost every interview, interviewing was a large part of their work. It was a way to become noticed and get donations which is crucial for their operation, yet some of my questions visibly took them by surprise.

I assume this may be because they are often asked the same questions during interviews that aim to simply explain what the organization is generally. I found that the more specific questions I asked the more suspicious it started to sound, or at least this is how I perceived it. The more it became apparent that I was not only interested in the very simple questions, the more I could see them begin to wonder how much of this they should actually be sharing. This would obviously never be information shared in a newspaper or magazine, so it is most likely something they did not consider before. However, I cannot know how they felt during the interview, this is only what I observed. I question if part of this perception stemmed from my own feelings of shame related to the fact that I was trying to uncover the interworking's of their operation. Perhaps deep down I do believe that I was doing them a disservice, describing intimate details of a somewhat anonymous collective. This was difficult for me to come to terms with while writing my analysis, especially considering that I intended for this research to hopefully benefit the collectives.

## Chapter 4: Interview Findings and Analysis

In the analysis of the three interviews I uncovered dominant themes of safety/security, invisibility, connection, and stress and emotional labor. While these themes are different, they are also hugely connected, sometimes making it difficult to distinguish between one another. While I may refer to some finding of the interview in one section, it likely relates to the others as well. I have separated each theme in order to explore them to the fullest extent, but hope to also demonstrate that they are interlocked and connected. Overall, the aim of my discussion is highlight how each theme is central to the dynamic work that Ciocia Basia, Wienia, and Czesia do.

Moreover, this discussion will reveal that within each thematic area, the Ciocia collectives are forced to navigate between borders and boundaries. This feature not only complicates their work further but also makes for intriguing findings. Borders and boundaries are present in nearly every aspect of the Ciocia collectives and the work they do. This is significant considering the geographical borders that impact their work greatly, with country borderlines determining the legality of their operation. As will be apparent, not every boundary is made clear, and not every border is the same for each collective. Navigating them can be tricky and must be done with caution.

### 4.1 Safety and Security

To begin, safety and security is a major theme that was present in all three conversations with the Ciocia collectives. I have chosen to speak about it first, as it was at the forefront of all the interviews conducted and is essential to the work the collectives do. As anticipated, the information the collectives are storing is private and highly personal. Confidentiality is crucial when discussing reproductive care generally, but especially so when risk of criminalization is present. As will be explored, the legality of the Ciocia collective's operation is variable and can shift from country to country. There are many aspects to consider and many risks present that the members must navigate while engaging in this work. Therefore, maintaining confidentiality and utilizing mechanisms for high security is a top priority as they are forced to bear the responsibility of keeping themselves and those they help safe. In this section I will outline

security measures taken and also detail reasons why they are needed in the first place, in order to stress the importance that safety and security play in cross-border activism in Central Europe.

To begin, before starting the interview's I was already quite cautious about privacy due to the sensitivity of the topic. I went into each meeting unsure if the Ciocia collectives would agree to being explicitly named or referred to directly in the research study. Even though I assured each interviewee that their name would be changed and their identity would be hidden, I made sure to receive consent that the collective itself could be named. Both Ciocia Basia and Ciocia Czesia agreed immediately during the interview that their collective could be named in this master's thesis; however, Hana from Ciocia Wienia did not feel comfortable making the decision on her own and chose to speak with the group before confirming. She expressed that she felt "it would be better if you refer to us as Ciocia Wienia, in Vienna... as long as individual names are not linked" but still decided to ask the others before giving a definite answer.

In general, Hana appeared to act with the most caution throughout the process when compared to Jessica from Ciocia Wienia and Beth or Olivia from Ciocia Basia. For instance, as previously disclosed, each member was given an informed consent form to sign before starting the interview. Hana did not sign the form with her name but rather opted to sign it as "Ciocia Wienia". Throughout the interview she spoke almost always as if she was answering for the group and did not include many personal opinions or comments unless openly asked. She was wary of the possibility of the interview transcript being included in the thesis and also requested that all direct quotes be sent to Ciocia Wienia for approval before use. In comparison, Olivia, Beth, and Jessica were less cautious, willing to sign with informed consent form and be directly quoted without question.

This was not the only difference found among the collectives in regards to confidentiality. Anonymity and rules surrounding privacy does not seem to be consistent among the three groups, as each presented different opinions on whether or not anonymity is necessary. For Ciocia Wienia, anonymity is very important. From their social media you can see that Ciocia Wienia members are kept completely anonymous, never posting their names or pictures of themselves on any platform. They are only referred to as Ciocia Wienia as a collective, and never

named individually. In our interview, Hana emphasized the importance placed on upholding privacy, stating “we value our anonymity, and of course, the anonymity of people coming to Vienna”. For her, being anonymous is crucial.

Conversely, Jessica from Ciocia Czesia stated, “I wouldn’t say we’re particularly anonymous”. On Ciocia Czesia Instagram page there are pictures of the members posted, even including some tags which would direct the viewer to the members private page. Jessica specifically is seen speaking in a video on their Instagram page and some other members are formally introduced in their own dedicated post, answering various questions such as, “What motivates you to work in Ciocia Czesia?” or “What does inclusivity mean in speaking of abortion?”. Still, Jessica echoes that if someone did not want to be posted this boundary would be respected. These differences exemplify that anonymity is not enforced on the collectives, and the privacy level upheld is their decision to make.

Although there are multiple factors to consider, the level of safety one may feel can determine whether or not they wish to disclose their identity, include their face in pictures, etc. If risk is perceived as high, one would likely take more precautions and maintain a certain level of privacy. If risk is perceived as low, or at least moderate, one may feel more comfortable to self-identify and be known. Risk levels can fluctuate depending on a country’s law and the interpretation of that law. The boundary between what is legal or illegal is not so defined, and is not consistent from country to country. The indistinctness of these borders can both complicate and potentially jeopardize the work of the Ciocia collectives.

As Beth and Olivia explain, in Germany abortion is technically illegal due to “a paragraph from over 150 years ago that is banning abortion”. However, after some time an additional paragraph was added which allowed abortion under certain circumstances. For instance, one situation in which German law deems it lawful to receive an abortion is if three days or more before the procedure the individual would see a social worker for a consultation. This consultation makes it legal for individuals to undergo an abortion in Germany, and without it they would not be able to receive care. This further complicates the timing of the procedure and creates an added pressure to arrive in time, as the minimum three day waiting period after the consultation can determine if

a doctor can legally perform the procedure or not. This could also increase the amount of time a person would have to spend in Germany, increasing cost of accommodation and effort for Ciocia Basia.

Luckily, Ciocia Basia members have found a way to nearly remove this barrier by providing users with the email address of two Polish speaking consultants who are able to do the consultation over the phone and then directly send the certification to the abortion clinic the individual will be going to. However still, on top of this, many clinics will require a pre-examination to take place a day before the actual procedure. There is no law which insists that this pre-examination take place on the day before yet still many clinics require it. As Beth explains, “there is no logical explanation for an ultrasound to be done the day before the procedure and not five minutes before the procedure”. When a clinic does insist on this, it adds to the time one must spend in Germany to receive the care and the travel and accommodation Ciocia Basia has to arrange.

Additionally, Olivia also divulges that “unfortunately in Germany access to abortion is not equal in every single space”. Depending on the region of Germany and the level of Catholicism within that region, the willingness of doctors to perform the operation can vary. While the law in Berlin and Bavaria are the same de jure, de facto they are not. Beth goes on to reveal that in recent past there existed a longstanding law which banned doctors from advertising that they provide abortion services. Just a few months before the interview took place this law was changed, now allowing doctors to advertise abortion as a service they provide. However, despite the law changing officially, most physicians have not responded or taken action. For the time being it is not common or usual to see the service advertised on a doctor’s webpage for instance. Olivia groans about Germany’s stance on abortion, expressing that with all these barriers and the poor attitudes of many doctors, “there is a lot of work and no change in sight”.

In Austria, there seems to be less constraints than in Germany as there are no pre-examinations or pre-counseling sessions required. Everything can be organized quite quickly and be completed in only one day. This makes it a bit easier for Ciocia Wienia to organize abortions in a timely manner. However, this is only really true for privately organized abortions done in a clinic rather

than a public hospital. As Hana explains, “hospitals are difficult to work with”. You must have an appointment to visit the hospital and you will be subjected to some uncomfortable questioning from the medical staff beforehand.

Similarly to Germany, in Austria abortion is also technically criminalized. However, the law states that it is “excused” if it is done in the first three months of pregnancy. Hana shares, “the surroundings are not ideal, but de facto, it’s possible”, so it’s okay compared to Poland. Assisting someone with getting an abortion is also legal in Austria however the Polish dimension can complicate things. Hana explains, “in Austria, it's legal to help and to get an abortion so we don't fear anything, but helping on Polish grounds with Polish websites and Polish... If there's too much Polish in it, it could get dangerous”. She also discloses that it is possible that in the future Poland would prohibit even informing about abortion, which would make this risk grow exponentially.

In the Czech Republic, there is also little clarity surrounding what is legal or not legal in terms of abortion access. Jessica shares that the Czech Republic has an “ancient law” which states that people from outside of the Czech Republic are prohibited from receiving an abortion in the country. However, the European Union has laws which cancels this law out, allowing anyone from an EU country to receive an abortion in the Czech Republic legally. Unfortunately, according to Jessica, “some clinics just don’t follow it” either because “they’re not informed well enough or are scared of consequences”. Again, we see that true access will depend on the clinic and doctor you choose to go to. Still, this Czech law continues to prohibit individuals from outside of the EU from receiving an abortion. This has increasingly become an issue as many Ukrainians have sought refuge in Poland due to the Russian invasion. These individuals have been forced to leave their home country where abortion was legal and are now left with minimal options for reproductive care. Because of this, Ciocia Czesia is unable to help anyone from the Ukraine, and instead point them to other collectives who can help.

From the very beginning of the interviews it became strikingly clear just how different abortion access is when stepping foot from one side of the border to the other. Depending on where members are working from changes what help they are able to offer and when drastically. As

Beth explains, much of the dialogue between the collectives is actually to confirm what the law say's about abortion in their country, since "you cannot remember all the abortions laws in the whole Europe". Furthermore, laws are not always clear or interpreted in the same way. New laws are introduced, some cancel each other out, and others are being modified still today. These factors make it increasingly difficult for Ciocia members to track and work around the laws in place. This tumultuous landscape also makes for higher insecurity in the legality of their work, as they are having to balance their countries laws along with the restrictive laws in Poland.

Due to this risk, feeling of unease, and sometimes fear, were expressed during the interviews. In Ciocia Basia, Beth and Olivia initially seemed to have differing opinions about the level of risk they are undertaking while engaging in this work. Although mostly working for Ciocia Basia from Germany, Beth worries about the legal consequences they could face being Polish citizens. It could be argued that living in Germany, or any other country for that matter, while still maintaining Polish citizenship could generate some additional danger for the members. The border between being a German resident but a Polish citizen is unclear. Nevertheless, Olivia responds to Beth's concern stating,

My professional opinion is that what we are doing is completely legal and nobody can do anything to us as long as we stay in, as long as we don't do the coordination and send the emails from Polish soil. But there are some voices in Poland who said otherwise. And because they're political voices, because the judicial system in Poland is more and more politicized, unfortunately, there's really no way of knowing how they will interpret the law ultimately.

Despite starting her argument in confident opposition to Beth's concern, Olivia ends her case ultimately agreeing with her, affirming that the law could be interpreted in several ways.

Jessica from Ciocia Czesia feels similarly, sharing "we're not doing anything illegal... it's legal to inform people about abortions, even in Poland", but still shares concerns about the potential of the law changing in the future. Moreover, although organizing abortions is legal in Austria, Hana feels that crossing the Polish border whether physically or online can pose some risks. Ciocia

Wienia has met with befriended lawyers on multiple occasions to discuss the potential consequences of helping organize abortions and anonymous births in Austria for Polish citizens. From these meetings, they have learned that there's always some risk when helping with abortions, and the more Polish involved the greater the risk is. Still, Hana confidently claims that they do not fear anything. They will continue to help while keeping themselves informed of legal risks and do what they can to minimize them.

Due to the hazardous nature of their job, the Ciocia collectives must aim to work as safely and securely as possible. Confidentiality is a top priority and there are a number of measures the collectives are taking to ensure all information is kept private. However, due to the fact that their clients are located in a different country, the Ciocia collectives are forced to work remotely. This makes them largely dependent on the internet and technology, also increasing their susceptibility to cyberattacks and data breaches. In an attempt to mitigate this, Olivia discloses that members only read case files in a secure platform "which shall remain unnamed". No additional details were provided, but it seems the Ciocia collectives are taking extra measures to ensure the data they store is not easily accessible from unwarranted outsiders. Still, Jessica recalls hearing that the Polish police recently gained access to a system which allows them to infiltrate "closed off spaces" that even use end-to-end encryption. Again, due to the variability of law interpretation, it is unclear how they could use this data to incriminate others now or in the future.

One major area of concern is communication between Ciocia members and the individuals they are helping as they are all potentially at risk for legal consequences. All three collectives shared the importance of using a secure server while communicating to those in Poland to avoid the threat of information being leaked. Olivia disclosed that Ciocia Basia members will only communicate via email or over the phone, and will not partake in sensitive conversations over social media. This is due to the fact that social media sites are not considered secure and therefore should not be used to collect personal information or detail abortion plans. Olivia elaborates saying, "sometimes people will write on Facebook, but they always receive the answer that they should write an email because Facebook is not a safe database".



Ciocia Wienia and Ciocia Czesia will only communicate via email and are careful to use safe email servers. Both Ciocia Basia and Ciocia Wienia use the Riseup server which is thought to be one of the safest servers according to Hana. The hope with using this server is that their data would not be somehow leaked. Ciocia Czesia uses an end-to-end encrypted email server called Proton for communication. Jessica states that they will not use Gmail “because it isn’t completely safe” and instead prefer “anarchist platforms”. She believes that if files are sent via Gmail for example there is a potential that they could be dug up later on.

Additionally, many if not most of the members of the Ciocia collectives are originally from Poland and will occasionally visit for various reasons. There are times during these visits where a member may have to work for the collective while technically being on Polish soil, increasing the risk of being legally charged or even arrested. To mitigate this risk, members will work only while connected to a VPN, which will effectively hide their IP address and therefore location while working. Beth shares that when working from Poland they are “taking all the security measures”, such as using a VPN, to avoid the risk of being arrested. She adds, “as much as I support the access to abortion for everyone who needs it, I wouldn’t like to go to jail for this”. Olivia agrees that it is essential to use a VPN while working outside of Germany, but also believes it should be used at all times for added safety.

On top of this, there are external dangers that are directly impacting the Ciocia collectives work and the individuals they are helping. There is a lot of incorrect information online spread by anti-choice people and others that try to deter individuals from seeking abortions. There are also gynecologists in Poland with “outdated opinions” who may refuse to see an individual for a checkup after getting an abortion abroad, or even traumatize the individual with harmful questioning or judgment during the appointment. On top of this, both Ciocia Wienia and Ciocia Czesia discussed the possibility of fake abortion clinics, specifically one that is thought to exist in Stonava in the Czech Republic. Although experiences at this clinic are mixed, both Hana and Jessica agreed that it is sketchy. Hana disclosed that Ciocia Wienia has received many complaints from people who travel there only to be turned away and not receive the abortion. In some instances the reasoning was attributed to disorganization, but in others the physician had

incorrectly directed an individual to return at a later time, at which point it would be too late to legally perform the abortion in the Czech Republic.

Jessica provided more detail, describing a case in which an individual went under anesthesia for an abortion and realized only a week or so later that they were still pregnant. The legitimacy of this clinic is uncertain, but it is clear that they are taking measures to conceal their operation to an extent. The clinic's website has blocked all Czech IP addresses but has chosen to allow Polish IP addresses, making it accessible to those inquiring from Poland only. Jessica further reveals that the clinic does not have an official address but rather includes a meeting point that people are told to go to. The clinic also sometimes operates on the weekend or at strange times when they are not meant to be open. Jessica comments "they know what they're doing is shady".

Still the line between real or not is unclear, as some people have had positive experiences there and successfully terminated their pregnancies. Although Ciocia Czesia does not recommend this clinic, some do still choose to go there as they are often the only place available on the weekend. When asked what the motive of the clinic would be, Jessica responds "it's a profit". In addition to this strange clinic there have also been instances of people selling fake abortion pills in the Czech Republic and sharing incorrect information of where to go to purchase the pills. From these stories it is clear that there are many scammers who will attempt to take advantage of individuals in vulnerable positions and put their safety at risk.

These experiences showcase that while doing feminist activism you cannot trust everyone who contacts you. There are many people who have bad intentions and would either like to profit expeditiously off you or undermine your work completely. With this in mind, when asked if there was any vetting process for becoming a Ciocia volunteer, Hana responded "there are many strange people and you never know who contacts you". She elaborates saying that when possible they try to meet new volunteers and get to know them a bit in order to establish a trust. Before starting to accompany people to clinics the new volunteers also go through a workshop where they learn what and what not to do, correct language to use when referring to the fetus, and generally what to expect while there.

Ciocia Basia also provides training for newcomers in which they “learn how to talk about abortion without the stigma” and sends all people interested in volunteering a questionnaire to learn more about how they would like to help. To Jessica’s knowledge the vetting process to join Ciocia Czesia is quite informal, but she is sure that they checked her social media accounts before allowing her to join to ensure they were not politically misaligned and make sure Jessica was in fact a real person. None of the collectives disclosed any negative experiences with people contacting them to volunteer, so it is logical that the joining process would not be particularly strenuous or difficult, especially considering the need for people that they are facing. However, in case a volunteer has an extended absence either for a vacation or otherwise, they are asked to “leave group chats and databases for safety”. This rule is necessary to ensure that only a select group of individuals who are actively being vigilant about safety have access to the data.

The larger threat lies with outsiders who are mistreating clients either by charging sizeable amounts of money, misguiding them purposefully to ensure they remain pregnant, or otherwise putting them in some type of danger. In order to avoid these threats and keep the individuals they help safe, the Ciocia collectives take special precautions such as sharing information about clinics or only using known doctors. For instance, when communicating with other groups around Germany in order to coordinate a case, Ciocia Basia will always check their database to see if there is a known clinic in the region that they can refer. The condition of the clinics and the physicians they employ vary, as Olivia makes clear “some are really terrible... some are really great”. Even in Berlin there are many doctors who will try to deter individuals from undergoing the procedure either by asking “if the person is sure they want to go through with the procedure” or describing the procedure as overly gruesome and painful. Thankfully most traveling from Poland to Germany seeking an abortion do not speak German, so the translator is able to leave out harmful comments made by the physician and even push back. This helps to “protect people from doctors who are not really competent” and advocate for the patient when they are unable to. In the past when this has happened Ciocia Basia volunteers have had serious conversations with the doctor, explaining that their behavior is not acceptable, and then make an internal note to remember to not use this doctor when possible.

To summarize, keeping a running list of trusted clinics in every country and region is an absolute must due to ill-mannered doctors and presence of so-called fake clinics in certain areas. Hana explains that many people will contact Ciocia Wienia just for information on who to trust and who not to trust. Even when people are not seeking financial help or accommodation, the Ciocia collectives are still able to provide useful information to anyone seeking an abortion in their country. Jessica shares the same, describing that one of Ciocia Czesia's goals is to really share knowledge and keep people updated on where to find a "safe space to have an abortion". From this it is clear that safety also for the individuals they are helping is an absolute priority for the collectives. There is an added responsibility as the collectives can be held accountable when referring someone directly to a clinic, so it is important to have confidence in its safety.

Recently it has become ever more apparent how crucial it is to comply with the law while doing abortion activism. As previously discussed, in 2020, Justyna Wydrzyńska, a member of Abortion Dream Team, was charged with aiding an abortion for giving an abortion pill to a woman in Poland who was in an abusive relationship. At the time of the interviews Justyna had not yet been convicted so it was unclear how the judge would rule or how the law would be interpreted. She has since been found guilty and sentenced to lengthy community service. When asked what impact Justyna's case has had on Ciocia Basia, Olivia explained,

There is impact. It's a topic that concerns all of us... We are having a lot more awareness about actual security. We completely changed our password policies, we are changing passwords regularly, the passwords are now long and complicated, before it was not the case. We are deleting emails as soon as possible... it very well started the discussion in our group as well, how we can make our work more secure for us and for the people we help

This response highlights the distress that many abortion activists in Poland and around Poland have experienced since Justyna's trial. Although it has sparked anger and wide-reaching protests, contributing to an increase in necessary conversations on reproductive rights in Poland, it has also made abortion activists examine their current security measures and level of confidentiality they uphold. One important piece Olivia mentions is the act of deleting emails as soon as they

are no longer needed. This is significant as email communication is the primary mechanism used to create a case and organize the abortion. By deleting emails Ciocia Basia is effectively erasing all traces of the case. This makes it safer for both parties in case of future investigation, especially due to the inconsistency of law interpretation and potential for the law to change and become stricter.

Hana states that although they do not fear charges, Justynas case definitely made Ciocia Wienia more careful. They are meeting with lawyers to continually stay informed and take extra precautionary measures. Similar to Ciocia Basia, Ciocia Wienia members limit what information they collect when creating a case and avoid storing it for very long. Hana elaborates stating,

We also... always only asked necessary stuff... for example, medical information about a person coming to Vienna, to be prepared. And we only asked what the clinics needed to know, but we never asked more. So we tried to, you know, keep it under the surface and only necessary information. We don't save anything. We try to delete emails and information if not needed anymore.

Jessica shares a similar sentiment, stating that she does not worry that something similar to Justynas case could happen in the Czech Republic, but does disclose that Ciocia Czesia may “start deleting more messages than [they] used to”.

As is evident from the interviews, Justyna Wydrzyńskas conviction has had lasting effects on abortion activists, even those which are operating from outside of Poland. More than anything this case as highlighted the risk that abortion activists are forced to face, especially now that Justyna has officially been convicted. The members of the Ciocia collectives who I spoke to have been clear that they are not afraid and this will not deter them from doing their work. As Hana proudly declares, “they cannot scare us or discourage us from doing activism”. Rather than allow fear to drive them, the Ciocia collectives have chosen to continue on but still make efforts to increase safety and security for their members and the individuals they help.

As brought up by all three collectives, one way to do achieve this is to delete email messages between the collective the individual seeking help. The act of deleting emails is noteworthy as by doing so they are essentially deleting all records of said case. Although the clinics may maintain some record of the patient, after closing a case the collectives have virtually no information of the individual they have helped. This is a radical act that forced me question if it is actually possible to do feminist activism without archives. Archives are crucial in feminist activism, as they allow us to remember the past and the changes that have successfully been brought upon. The Ciocia collectives seem to maintain very little evidence of their work, yet it is no question that the work the collectives are doing is deeply feminist. It should be both recognized and remembered in order to create sustainable change in Poland and the rest of the world, but in many ways, it must be hidden and concealed for safety reasons. This begs the question, how can you do invisible activism?

#### 4.2 Invisibility

This section will examine the overarching theme of invisibility, and the boundary the Ciocia collectives have to navigate between being invisible versus visible, informal versus formal, and anonymous versus known. To begin, the overall visibility of the collectives as whole can be called into question. In fact, when first choosing my research subject I myself questioned if the collectives did currently exist and if they were active or not. Having known someone who previously helped to raise money for Ciocia Czesia in Prague, I was quite confident that they were real. But when it came to other, further away collectives, I was not so sure. In fact, one of the main reasons for choosing to include Ciocia Wienia and Basia in my case study in addition to Ciocia Czesia was the fact that the collectives followed one another on social media. Seeing them repost or tag one another on Instagram suggested to me that they were in fact operating.

For other Ciocia collectives such as Ciocia Monia or the collective in Frankfurt which I still do not know the name of, I had only heard whispers about before. It was unclear how established they were and if I would be able to contact them at all. Without directly hearing about one of the collectives it would be quite possible that someone would never discover them, or know organizations like this exist at all. However, once you learn of the existence of one and do even a

bit of searching the network begins to reveal itself. As I expressed to the interviewees, the more I read the more organizations I would discover, soon becoming what would sometimes feel like a never-ending thread of groups across all of Europe. Hana commented on this, saying,

The reason that there's always one collective you haven't heard of is that there is more need for abortion because of this more and more restrictive laws, and they are more and more people who want to help. So there's always a new group that that operates in the new country, or in a new city...there's always somebody that will help.

Although the three Ciocia collectives I interviewed are present online, it is not the easiest to find them. Ciocia Wienia and Ciocia Czesia are quite active on social media, while Ciocia Basia is not. There are websites, or at the very least, Facebook pages which openly present each collective, however no clear directory. One would most likely have needed to hear the name first before being able to discover one of the collectives and the services they offer. In the interview with Ciocia Wienia, Hana expresses this concern stating, “I don't know why but it's not so easy to find us. I think one would have to search many websites to get the information about us because there are many sketchy websites from anti-choice people that are trying to prevent abortions”.

Furthermore, in regard to visibility, Hana from Ciocia Wienia states,

We are still pretty much under the surface. So we are not known, like, for example, Abortion Without Borders. So, I think there's not really a target for many haters. And it's good like that, because if people want to get an abortion they still get the information but we still... really are not very public. So no, there's not many problems.

From this response, it is clear that there is a certain level of safety that comes with being less known. While visibility levels vary between the three Ciocia collectives, largely due to Ciocia Basia's association with Abortion Without Borders, invisibility does offer some protection for both the collectives and their clients. By being an informal group only discoverable through certain channels, the risk of being a target of conservative politicians decreases, making it easier

for the collective to operate and exist without being in the spotlight. For these reasons it may be advantageous to adhere to a level of discretion. However, this is of course up to the collective themselves, and not every group operates in the same way.

The situation for Ciocia Basia is a bit different as they are a part of Abortion Without Borders which is quite well known. Because of this, many times people are directed to Ciocia Basia after first contacting Abortion Without Borders. Olivia even recalls a few times in which a gynecologist in Poland recommended that a patient contact them. In addition to this, Ciocia Basia has stickers displaying their name, phone number, email, and the question “POTRZEBUJESZ ABORCJI?” which translated to “DO YOU NEED AN ABORTION?”. The pink colored sticker has little information but the purple and white hearts surrounding the name give a friendly impression. Olivia and Beth unwaveringly agree that the goal is to “stick the entire Poland” and even gifted me some to post around Poland during my next visit.

Posting these stickers all around Poland demonstrates Ciocia Basia’s wish to be visible and discovered by those who are in need of an abortion. Yet it is essential that their existence be known in a country where they are not legally allowed to operate or physically work in. Because of this, the work of these collectives is largely invisible. Pregnant Poles quietly leave their country and return after a short period of time no longer pregnant. Their gynecologist at home will have no record of them ever receiving an abortion, and the collective which organized it for them won’t either.

As previously discussed, the Ciocia collectives do not keep records of the abortions they organize. This is for their own safety and the safety of those they help. Most email exchanges and records of personal data are deleted once the procedure has been completed or the information is no longer needed. By removing this evidence, it is as if the person has ceased to exist. The collectives are erasing their users but also subsequently their work. They are engaging in such important work yet are forced to delete all proof that it ever occurred. Still in order to raise awareness and the funds that come with it, the Ciocia collectives must publicize some information such as statistics from the year.



This demonstrates again how the Ciocia collectives tread the line between being visible and invisible. They are not able to share any details about the people they have helped but must continue to share that they have helped. There are no records of these people, or substantial proof that the abortion ever even occurred, but the numbers must be tracked. In interviews and on their social media accounts each collective has shared some information regarding their work, including statistics. For example, on Instagram Ciocia Czesia revealed that in 2022 they spent 31,473 euros to pay for the abortions for 76 different people, and were contacted by 1,506 people asking for help. Abortion Without Borders created a post disclosing that in total 378 people had abortions in 2021, with Ciocia Basia arranging 243 in Berlin, 102 in other German cities, and 33 in Vienna with the help of Ciocia Wienia. These statistics show that, to a certain extent, the collectives are actively keeping track of the help they offer.

While it is unclear what tracking mechanism is utilized, personal information is never included. By posting on social media and revealing these numbers in interviews the collectives are able to receive praise and an expected increase in donations. This is likely because once the public learns of how many people they have helped, and the number of people who have contacted them, the need for their services is made clear. Sharing a statistic that Ciocia Czesia spent over 6,000 euros in just the first three months of 2023 is powerful because it highlights the demand. This demonstration increases the confidence in the donors that their money is directly going to people in need and may even increase the probability that they will donate again. For these reasons, visibility is important; but for the safety of others, invisibility is too.

To summarize, the Ciocia collectives continually have to cross the border between being visible or invisible. In order to offer their services to those in need they must be somewhat known. To achieve this, they post stickers throughout Poland, share resources and stories on social media, and participate in interviews for local media. Still, they are not extremely visible online or elsewhere. They are forced to operate in a country which their target client group do not reside in. While some infrequent trips to Poland provide the opportunity to post stickers advertising their services, and having close relations with individuals in Poland can allow for their existence to be spread via word of mouth, all three collectives are largely invisible in Poland. Thankfully the internet and social media websites do cross borders. This allows for information to be spread

easily and quickly from one country to the next. Still these borders are only crossable if you already know where to go, posing some issues for those unfamiliar with the collectives.

Fortunately, larger organizations such as Abortion Without Borders have a physical presence in Poland and appear to be quite well-known. Due to their partnerships with organizations throughout Europe, individuals who contact Abortion Without Borders are able to be directed to an organization best fit for them based on their needs, location, etc. Although Ciocia Wienia and Ciocia Czesia are not officially a part of Abortion Without Borders they are still in continual contact with them and the other Ciocia collectives. As Jessica states, “we cooperate”. If they are contacted by someone in the south of Poland within 12 weeks of pregnancy, Abortion Without Borders will direct the individual to contact Ciocia Czesia.

There is also an informal common chat that is used to ask if they “can send people their way” (Beth, Ciocia Basia) or confirm abortion laws in each country as it can be a lot to keep track of. Olivia explains that this was particularly useful during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic when updates were constantly needed due to the many changes in travel requirements and clinic requirements. Hana explains that if “one collective gets contacted by a person, that would be a better fit for another collective due to geographical reasons or whatever, then we discuss it and we propose the solution to the person so at the end, they decide. But we are in contact and we try to find the best solution”. This connection mitigates some of the issues that arise with being lesser known, and allows for people to get the help they need quickly and efficiently.

#### 4.3 Connection

This section will explore the connection the three Ciocia collectives have to one another to better understand their dynamics both together and a part and learn how they rely on one another. To begin, though the three collectives share the name “Ciocia” they are individual groups which are separated from one another. Each was created completely independently without planned organization from a prior collective. Still, they were able to help when needed. Olivia from Ciocia Basia does recall Ciocia Czesia reaching out for advice and input before they officially

formed back in 2020, adding “it is also why we are so close I think, with two of the other Ciocias, because we really support each other with advice and know how”.

As it is quite obvious, the collectives are physically located in different cities and different countries, with a geographical border determining which laws are applicable. Because of this there is a clearly defined line dictating where one collective’s jurisdiction starts and ends, and which collective an individual can turn to when they need help. Each collective is responsible for raising their own money and all finances are kept completely separate. Not sharing finances highlights the collective’s division in many ways, due to the fact that funds are essential for the operation of each collective. Without money the collectives would not be able to fund abortion procedures, travel, accommodation, or anything necessary for reproductive care. This puts an added pressure on each collective to continually fundraise and raise money since there is not a common pool of money to rely on.

Additionally, although working towards the same goal and operating in a very similar manner, the collectives are not a part of all the same groups. Out of the three collectives, only Ciocia Basia is officially a part of Abortion Without Borders. When asked why this was, the answers were mixed, with Olivia from Ciocia Basia declaring it “a very complicated question”. She went on to mention some prior disagreements with Abortion Without Borders surrounding this subject, but declined to speak further on it due to her own personal opinion on the matter. Although I was intrigued by this refusal I ultimately decided it was best not to push Olivia to speak further on the matter as she set a very clear boundary. However, she did disclose that Abortion Without Borders and its partners hold a meeting once a month which they sometimes attend. Beth added that for Ciocia Basia, it’s more for networking and provides a “sense of being like constantly in touch with other groups”, as they do not get any financial benefits from the partnership.

Both Hana and Beth attributed Ciocia Wienia and Czesia’s absence in Abortion Without Borders to the older status of Ciocia Basia, as Ciocia Wienia and Czesia were not yet established when Abortion Without Borders was formed. The possibility for Ciocia Wienia and Ciocia Czesia to join Abortion Without Borders in the future is not off the table, but for now they are not

included. Still, despite this boundary that says who is and who is not officially partnered with Abortion Without Borders, collaboration is not restricted. Regardless of their partnership status, they are supportive of one another in public spaces and are in contact when necessary. Abortion Without Borders has sent individuals to contact both Ciocia Wienia and Ciocia Czesia on multiple occasions in order to secure care for those in need. As Hana affirms, “the networking really exists, and it works, so it’s great”.

Outside of working with Abortion Without Borders the three Ciocia collectives also maintain an informal chat where they work together to ensure everyone who contacts them is helped in a way that makes the most sense depending on their location and need. Whether the individual is seeking an abortion in the north of Poland, south of Poland, or wants to give birth anonymously as is allowed in Austria, the collectives work together to find a suitable plan. Being able to frequently communicate with one another leads to more efficient planning and more successful abortion missions. By having alternative options, it allows for some pressure, and especially time pressure, to be reduced, as members know they are not alone and not the only ones available to help. Olivia provides some context explaining,

With Vienna... we are sending people who are, for example, very close to the deadline and... we have no time to organize this obligatory consultation and then wait three days. Because they can just go there without it which is nice. And we sometimes lose precious time waiting the three days and then there is really a question of how the doctor will see the pregnancy with more than 14 weeks or less unfortunately.

As Olivia explains, Ciocia Wienia is often a great option for individuals who contact them with a further along pregnancy. The closer to the deadline someone may contact Ciocia Basia, the less likely they are able to help them, as German law requires a consultation three days prior to the procedure. In Austria, they do not have this requirement, so individuals are able to have the procedure done immediately. Hana adds that sometimes people even come to Austria too late, not knowing that they are already in the 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy. But in these cases, Ciocia Wienia is able to contact another group such as Abortion Network Amsterdam in the

Netherlands where the gestational limits for abortion are longer. Hana explains that they “are in contact and try to find the best solution” and after consulting one another, the collective is able to “propose the solution to the person so at the end, they decide”.

Overwhelming the interviewees expressed that they were more than satisfied with the collaboration occurring between Ciocia Basia, Wienia, and Czesia. Olivia proclaimed “I love cooperating with them, they are amazing. They are very reliable and they always answer very quickly”. When asked if anything could be improved in terms of the collaboration, Hana responds,

Actually... I don't think so. I think everybody's doing their best. I think we're really good connected so you can count on getting an answer. Within minutes, sometimes hours.

There's always somebody that is there for you. And I am very happy that it is the way it is.

Jessica echoes this sentiment answering, “no, I’m happy with it”, and later jokes that she wishes everything was that easy. To date there has never been an official meeting of the Ciocia collectives in person, but there is a plan to have their first Ciocia meeting this year.

The collective’s shared purpose and connection to one another works to blur the line between Ciocia Basia, Wienia, and Czesia, and further erase the distinction between who is and is not a part of Abortion Without Borders. Although formed completely autonomously and responsible for securing their own funding, the borders become much less defined when it comes to finding a solution to arranging reproductive care for someone in need. The Ciocia collectives are determined to help and offer the best possible solution according to the unique circumstances of the individual’s pregnancy, location, desire, etc. Their connection to one another is powerful and quite simply lifesaving. If it wasn’t for their willingness to communicate and ability to rely on one another many people would go without help and be forced to give birth or attempt to abort the fetus on their own in an unsafe manner. Due to their connection, the Ciocia collectives are able to efficiently and successfully help many individuals in need of reproductive care, and support each other through difficult moments.

#### 4.4 Stress and Emotional Labor

This section will highlight the intimacy involved in activism and reproductive justice in central Europe. Assisting others to receive vital reproductive care can be highly emotional and stressful due to the weight of the situation and time pressures involved. In order to combat this and make this volunteer work sustainable, the Ciocia collectives have worked to make accommodations and set boundaries both physically and emotionally. To begin, there are many stressors involved when organizing abortions for someone located in a different country. You have to account for language barriers, plan travel routes, arrange lodging, secure an appointment, and any other aspect required by the countries laws you are operating in. The process is not easy or simple, and can often take a significant amount of time, especially when accounting for the time it may take to get all the information needed from someone over the phone or by email.

The added pressure that everything must be completed before a certain week in order to have a legal abortion is also taxing, especially when some people are prone to wait to the last moment to ask for help. Olivia shares, “when half of these people are already in the 12th week of pregnancy, and you have to schedule everything for the next week... that can be a bit too much considering that we're also doing this while working full time”. Beth certainly agrees with Olivia, adding,

Or my favorite people... people who are writing us in sixth week or seventh week of pregnancy, say asking questions about the procedure in Germany, and we always send them the whole info stack like what are the options, until which week, and then there is nothing. And then in the last possible moment for Germany, when they have very little time, they write us and we have to organize everything very quickly, rather than being like relaxed and having our time before.

From this we learn that there is sometimes a lack of consideration coming from the individual in need, likely due to the own distress they are experiencing. These situations can become quite stressful when piled on top of one another, especially when considering the fact that most members are also working or going to school full time as pointed out by Olivia. Everyone is a

volunteer in Ciocia Basia, Wienia, and Czesia, meaning no one is getting paid for the services they offer or the work they do. Most members are crossing the border between paid and unpaid work throughout their day, as well as coupling it with school and studies. “Everything is after hours” (Hana) and “everyone has other priorities” (Olivia), yet the work has to get done. When asked if anything could be improved, Jessica responds, “I think the only issue is that we, you know, we have lives. We study, we work and we have family and friends and problems”.

As is clear, by working on a voluntary basis for the collectives it is necessary for members to also work paid jobs for survival. Hana explains, “we don’t get paid from Ciocia Wienia because it’s just not manageable, there is no money”. All money raised by the three collectives individually have gone solely to funding abortions or materials or events for promotion to subsequently raise more money. While this is not completely unique to feminist activism, it can be argued that the pressures present with abortion organizing make it more difficult to manage without pay. The time constraints and individual-ness of each case creates a sizeable amount of work and pressure at any given moment. Regardless of the volunteer’s availability each case must be handled in a timely manner, otherwise the individual is left helpless with the potential to pass the gestational limit in said country.

These pressures have been especially challenging for Ciocia Basia who are “struggling a bit with the amount of people who are active at the moment” (Olivia). Although ideally the group would like to have two people in charge of emails at a time, and two people in charge of phone calls at a time, this is not always possible. Due to the lack of members currently present it can be the case that someone is working alone during a week-long shift, and subsequently responsible for coordinating a case from start to finish by themselves. This can be extremely challenging to manage when coupled with other priorities, and may even lead to feelings of burn out. When asked if they are considering to hire anyone for a paid position, Olivia responds, “I don’t think we are at this point. I don’t know if we ever will be... so unpaid labor it is”.

Moreover, despite Ciocia Basia, Wienia, and Czesia members being volunteers who are choosing to help others without any monetary incentive, it does not always seem apparent to the individuals who are seeking an abortion. Jessica explains, “often people who email us are kind of

frustrated and it kind of feels like they think we're, you know, getting some money for recommendations of hospitals and such, but we get nothing". Possibly due to the fact that people do not always recognize the Ciocia collectives as informal, volunteer-based abortion organizers, they can feel entitled to immediate help or help that may be considered beyond reason. Jessica shares that in some cases they have been contacted by people who have not even taken a pregnancy test yet, but insist that they are in fact pregnant and need to have an abortion arranged. This can be detrimental to the group considering how time consuming abortion organizing is. Even more so when understaffed, spending valuable time and resources on an individual who may not even be pregnant is inefficient and wasteful.

Furthermore, Olivia and Beth share that they frequently encounter a scenario they have named "abortion ghosting", in which the person does not show up for the abortion without warning. They both share feelings of frustration around the topic and their desire for people to be honest and communicative with them throughout the whole process. Beth expands, "every reason to not come through with an abortion is a valid reason as long as you fucking tell us this so we can cancel everybody... ghosting is a real thing". Their frustration with this phenomenon is valid when considering the amount of work that goes into every case just for the individual not to show up. Without informing the collective prior, many parties are negatively impacted, including the volunteer taking time out of their day to wait at the clinic, the physician, etc. On the opposite end of this spectrum, Olivia shares that sometimes "people just appear" without any prior communication or coordination, and simply write to Ciocia Basia "I am in Berlin, please help", or "where should I be for an abortion tomorrow?". This highlights the extent to which people underestimate the amount of work that goes into organizing an abortion, and the level of expectation or borderline entitlement that is felt.

Whether people are under the impression that Ciocia members are being paid for their efforts or simply too stressed out due to their unwanted pregnancy, all interviewees expressed to some extent that there is a clear lack of consideration from some people who contact them seeking help. Cases like this can add to the distress felt by the already under resourced and overworked members. The lack of consideration is further exemplified by poor communication and excessive emailing from the individual



seeking care. Hana states, “some people are difficult to communicate with... some people are not used to typing, not used to sending everything in one email”, so it can take a lot of emailing back and forth before gathering all the information needed. Olivia shares an example that if you ask a simple question such as, “do you want us to find a house for you?”, you might receive three emails in response, none of which are actually answering the question you asked.

Beth discloses that bad communication is of the biggest obstacles for her. She states that “sometimes they treat our emails as if it was a chat”, often receiving multiple emails from the same person in a short span of time with “three words in each”. Jessica discusses similar situations sometimes occurring at Ciocia Czesia in which the emailing becomes completely excessive. She states,

Some people like... when they email us, because of our well-being, it's gonna be impossible to help them because of their thought patterns or some other issues that we are not capable of solving. So, um, it can be frustrating. But I think there's only been one time when I was like, okay, I cannot talk to this person anymore. Because like, 70 emails were just spent like... my approach maybe isn't working, maybe someone else could find a better way to talk to this person.

Although frustrating, here Jessica offers an example of a situation in which she has had to set a boundary in order to protect herself and her own well-being. Rather than force herself to continue to email this person and become exceedingly wearier, Jessica chooses to step away and asks for help from other members. In addition to protecting herself she is also being considerate towards the individual seeking care, as another member of Ciocia Czesia may be able to communicate in a different style that is more efficient for this particular individual. Jessica is also setting a precedent that boundaries are important to enforce when dealing with difficult people, and that your own well-being must take priority. Olivia has also taken part in this, and she discloses,

We are trying to set boundaries. For example... last week, I had a person who was treating the email like a messenger, and the only thing that worked was like saying to her

two times, 'I know that you're scared, I know this is an uncomfortable situation. This is very understandable. But if you are writing to me 11 messages as an answer to one of my emails, I cannot help you, and I cannot help other people who are also simultaneously writing the messages' ...usually it works.

Additionally, in an attempt to combat people showing up to hosts homes unannounced, Beth explains that she has stopped giving the address directly to the person coming for an abortion. She now will only provide them with the phone number of the host so they are forced to contact them before coming. Setting boundaries like these is practiced across all three Ciocia collectives in various ways. Some boundaries set are physical boundaries that dictate the extent to which members can work in order to avoid burnout and alleviate stress. For instance, in Ciocia Wienia they only communicate via email and do not have an active phone number where they can be reached. Hana explains this is because it provides “more space and privacy” as they can choose designated times to answer the emails, rather than have a phone that could ring at any time. In Ciocia Czesia members do not work on the weekends “unless there’s some very important issue” (Jessica) to ensure that they have time for themselves and other priorities.

For Ciocia Basia, the COVID-19 pandemic presented a new opportunity for members to establish boundaries between themselves and their volunteers and the people they help. Despite having access to the vaccine, many people in Poland did not choose to get vaccinated against COVID-19, and therefore posed a higher risk for those around them. When an unvaccinated person contacted Ciocia Basia seeking assistance and accommodation, they were faced with a difficult decision. Olivia explained, “how could we live with each other if we send this person to our hosts? We really like our hosts and they are amazing people who are giving their time and space to strangers coming to Berlin”. Ultimately, they decided to not allow unvaccinated individuals to stay with them due to the risk it put their hosts in. While this was difficult due to the requirement of having a pre-exam the day before the abortion, they stuck to their decision, even if it meant someone had to come to Germany twice.

Furthermore, Ciocia Czesia members do not escort anyone to the clinic or interact with them face-to-face to all. Although this is largely due to the far distance between Prague and Ostrava, Jessica explains that emailing is “emotionally tiring for many people already”. This is understandable, considering how communicating with people while their emotions are heightened may be especially taxing and possibly affect one’s own emotional state. Although organizing abortions may make you feel liable due to the weight it holds, Jessica voices the importance of not internalizing the problems of the people that email them. Jessica explains that while there is “some stress” that “the abortion will not be paid for” or “something else goes wrong”, overall it has not been too difficult since she actively works to not internalize the problem.

Ultimately, it is important for the Ciocia collectives to establish emotional boundaries between themselves and the people who reach out for help. This however is not always easy due to the sensitive nature of their work. Hana explains that,

After the verdict, many people with wanted pregnancies that were not able to stay pregnant contacted us, which was mentally challenging. Many didn't know what to do and were very crushed and... we somehow got involved, emotionally. And we were searching for a way to set you know, borders, boundaries.

This situation, while challenging, provided the motivation for Ciocia Wienia to seek supervision, or counseling, for their members. Remarkably, a befriended psychologist has offered her services to Ciocia Wienia free of charge. Now whenever members are struggling emotionally with a situation they are able to go to supervision and talk it through together with a psychologist. Ciocia Czesia has never arranged supervision or organized a support group but Jessica says they “are there for each other” and “if someone is frustrated they can vent in the group chat”. She adds, “we’re all like aware of emotions and burn out and help each other”, making it easier to manage.

Ciocia Basia used to go to something similar to supervision, but stopped because at the time it didn’t seem necessary. Upon answering this question Olivia reflects and shares,

But also, this is something that we would like to work on as a group. Because at this time, we spent zero money out of the money we get to actually sustain our growth. All of the money, every single cent, goes for abortions. And we were thinking that because we are important for this work... if we give up, burnout, which happened before for some members that are no longer there, then it's quite a shitty situation. So we are you planning to have from time to time, I don't know once a year or something, some kind of event where we could take care of each other and talk and meet and laugh and share experiences, and kind of like work on our bond within group and also our physical, psychological well-being.

Here Olivia makes a very important point, that in order for the work to be done, the members of the collective must also be cared for. It can be quite easy to commit to dedicating every cent earned to abortion organizing due the direness of the current situation in Poland; however, without active and engaged members the Ciocia collectives would not be able to operate to the extent that they do now. The threat of burn out is very real for many activists who are working so closely with their subjects, especially when under an immense amount of pressure. As touched on by Olivia, some members have already quit the collective completely. The more members who leave the more difficult the operation becomes, as the collective becomes even more under resourced and the work piles up.

In an attempt to avoid this, all three collectives offer a high level of flexibility to their volunteers. In Ciocia Czesia Jessica explains that members are able to go on vacation for as many months as needed, even if it's half the year. Hana shares the same, stating that if somebody needs time off they can always take the time they need. Additionally, if someone is scheduled to work but ends up not feeling well they are always able to find a solution. She adds, "everybody does as much as they can, as much as they want, and it's totally fine". Although they sometimes need to prioritize abortion organizing over interviews, "the work is getting done". Ciocia Basia also does not require members to be active at all times and people often take extended breaks. Olivia shares, "I

always like taking a break but I am looking forward to do more abortions after the break”, highlighting how flexibility and time off can be beneficial for the sustainability of the group.

Everyone interviewed expressed that they enjoy the flexibility offered and informal nature of the Ciocia collectives. These elements created greater satisfaction with work, which is key when navigating between paid labor and unpaid labor. Moreover, Hana shares that she believes “it wouldn’t work if we weren’t friends... we all have other jobs and families and friends and everything is after hours, and if you don’t like what you do after hours and not paid... it’s very difficult to do it for a long time”. Here Hana emphasizes the importance of being friends with one another and supporting each other through the process. Jessica adds that when someone is unable to handle a case because the person is “too anxious, too stressed out, sharing too many personal things”, there are others who can help. Without this ability, it is unclear for how long a volunteer-based group would be able to operate.

In discussing the stress and emotional labor members of the Ciocia collectives are faced with, one may start to wonder why someone would join in the first place. Asking this question to the interviewees revealed a deeper emotional incentive that is behind member motive to join. Hana shares that the more she learned about the situation in Poland the more rattled she became. She shares, “you know it's not only abortion, it's everything that's somehow connected to reproductive rights. It's like if you see the pregnancy as a timeline from before, during, and after, the people are left alone at every stage”. Having this realization made Hana want to help, and this is her way of doing it.

Jessica shares something similar stating, “it sounds really simple but I just wanted to help”. She recalls her friends and family going to demonstrations in Poland and feeling stupid for “just sitting in the Czech Republic” unable to do much. For her it seems joining Ciocia Czesia was a way to cope from the guilt of not being in Poland. She states, “were Polish, but we don’t live in Poland, so we can’t really dismantle the system from the inside”. Being a part of Ciocia Czesia allows Jessica to be engaged in the fight for reproductive justice in a different way, and still feel as if she is making a difference for those still in Poland. From Ciocia Basia, Beth attributes her

joining to feelings of anger. Olivia does as well, however she adds that for her it was also a way to alleviate the anxiety she was experiencing when having sex. She shares,

I joined because I wanted to kind of also take my own life and my own fear into my own hands, and see how it works from the other side, like from the side of organizing an abortion actually. And I wanted to help people who are as scared as I was of unwanted pregnancy and don't happen to live in the country where they can access it.

Still, interestingly, all interviewees to some extent revealed that they do not want to be doing this work, but are rather doing it because they have to. When asked what the main goal of their Ciocia collective is, Jessica responded that their "main goal would be for the law to be more normal". Olivia responded, "the goal is to be a redundant thing of the past", as "ultimately, all of [them] would like to be not necessary". Although the work they are doing is remarkable, remembering the reason they are needed can be sobering. Hana shares,

There's always somebody that will help, which is great on the one hand, but it's, I hate the fact that the help is needed. I hate the fact that the government leaves you to yourself and first interferes with your body and then, you know, says just like, okay you're on your own and then there's the collectives to help.

To summarize, from the intimate revelations provided by the interviewees, it is clear that there is a lot of stress and emotional labor involved in abortion organizing. They are under an immense amount of pressure and are forced to communicate with individuals who are not always courteous or individuals who are highly emotional. The topic itself is also very sensitive and can bring up personal feelings and emotions. The Ciocia collectives have found ways to reduce these negative feelings by offering flexibility and resources such as counseling. They also support one another whenever possible. While their motivations for engaging in this work is clear, ultimately the goal is for the collective to cease existing due to lack of need.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

### 5.1 Reproductive Justice and Activism in Central Europe

In conclusion, the Ciocia collectives tell us that reproductive justice and activism in Central Europe comes with a fair share of challenges. They are faced with sketchy clinics, disrespectful doctors, and varying laws and requirements which can change on a regular basis either due to the state of a pandemic or an interpretation. Access to abortion is not always consistent across even one country, let alone the surrounding region. Because of this there is a lot of information to keep track of and consider when organizing an abortion or doing any other activism related to reproductive justice. While it is not yet illegal to inform people about abortion in Poland, there are many political figures who are loudly advocating for this to change. In case this change would go into effect in the near future, it is important to act with a certain level of caution even when operating outside of the country.

Although the Ciocia collectives are not allowing geographical borders to dictate where their activism starts or ends, these borders are in a sense very real, as they directly determine the legality of each abortion. Crossing from one side of a border to another can drastically change what is considered a legal gestational limit, and impact the amount of risk one faces when organizing or undergoing the procedure. This is one of the many reasons members must be well informed of the law, and apply strict security measures to ensure safety for themselves and those they help. Although country borderlines exist, laws are still up for interpretation to an extent, and are continuing to change. In order to mitigate risk, the Ciocia collectives take precautions such as using secure servers, working from a VPN, deleting emails, and more.

One finding that stood out was the need to delete records once an abortion mission is complete. After learning about the safety and security risks involved, this act does make a bit more sense; however, it raises some concern when considering the importance archives have in feminist work and activism. It is possible that this is a result of the notion that the collectives are operating out of pure necessity, and not because they want to be doing this work. As they disclosed, their main goal and hope for the future is to cease to exist. They are merely a means to an end, acting only

to ensure individuals in Poland can get an abortion, without putting much effort towards actually enacting change. Because of their physical location, they often feel limited in their ability to help, or “dismantle the system from the inside” as Jessica nicely put it. Because their long-term goal is to dissolve, the need for archives is lessened, making it easier, and safer, for the Ciocia collectives to delete all records of the people they help. In sum, the work the Ciocia collectives do tells us that archives may not be necessary for reproductive justice and activism in central Europe.

In some aspects, it is necessary to walk the border between being visible and invisible when participating in activism in Central Europe. Due to safety and security threats present, it can be beneficial to operate a bit more under the radar that one may expect. This can contribute to a reduction in unwanted attention from conservative political parties, and overall limit public backlash. Still, the collectives need to be known in order to be found by the those they help and those who will donate money which pays for all the abortions arranged. While anonymity and confidentiality were perceived differently by each collective, the Ciocia collectives remained firm that they would not be scared from doing their work. Ultimately the Ciocia collectives demonstrated how to fearlessly do activism while simultaneously accounting for the risks present and mitigating them when possible.

Interviews with Ciocia Basia, Wienia, and Czesia highlighted the intimacy, stress, and emotional labor that is involved in activism and reproductive justice in central Europe. Most of all these interviews shun light onto the risk of burnout activists may face, especially when operating under such stringent time constraints. Participating in activism which is unpaid, while rewarding, forces volunteers to balance school, work, family, and other personal obligations against their activism. This can lead to members needing extended breaks or additional mental health resources in order to avoid burnout. In extreme cases it can cause members to stop volunteering all together. This is not only sad but also can lessen a groups numbers and snowball into a larger problem in which members are forced to work longer hours or additional shifts, and feel even more overwhelmed than before.



This is not very surprising considering the large amount of work and effort that is needed in order to arrange just a single abortion. This is even more intensified when working with individuals who may feel entitled to help immediately or on their own terms. The sensitive nature of the works also complicates further, sometimes creating heightened emotions. Because of this, the Ciocia collectives display the need for establishing emotional and physical boundaries with those who they help. Despite the extreme stress and time pressures that is innate to reproductive justice activism in Central Europe, it is essential to avoid internalizing the problem. The Ciocia collectives thankfully emphasized that despite all these obstacles, they are never alone, and are able to rely on each other and their network throughout the process.

## 5.2 Potential for Feminist Solidarity

As Ciocia Basia outlines on their social media platforms, “practical feminist solidarity means to make safe abortions possible for unwantedly pregnant people from Poland” (Ciocia Basia, 2018). Reproductive justice asks us to look at the limits that the law poses and configure strategies, whether legal or not, to create justice. In combining law and social activism, reproductive justice provides a more than adequate framework to examine the near total abortion ban in Poland. Despite political leaders failing us, feminism can still be a mechanism for change. Moreover, feminist solidarity and abortion activism can be viewed as a conceptual innovation of the traditional ways of looking at geopolitical regions. Although the physical borders constructed still largely exist within Europe and worldwide, feminists and especially abortion activists do not view these borders as concrete obstacles that are unable to be crossed. Feminist solidarity and abortion activism stretches beyond these borders due to a common goal, to ensure that women and anyone with the ability to become pregnant has access to reproductive care including abortions.

Ciocia Basia, Wienia, and Czesia pure existence demonstrates the potential for feminist solidarity. Wickstrom et al. (2021) describes feminist solidarity as “a form of organizing which envisages a shared responsibility for the lives of others, working with care and intimacy, and toward social transformations that are made possible through democratic engagement”. From my research and in depth interviews with members from each collective, I think it is clear that the

Ciocia collectives are doing just this. Despite having access to abortion in the country in which they reside in, the members of the Ciocia collectives volunteer their time to help others who are not as fortunate. By engaging in this work they are reducing the amount of violence and control that pregnant individuals in Poland and elsewhere are subject to. This is not because they themselves are subjected to it, but because they feel a sense of responsibility for others lives. This feeling is even more enhanced when coupled with the fact that most of the members were once living in Poland, and currently have people who they care for still living there and enduring its harsh conditions. While they are not able to create much change within Poland, they still feel accountable for the lives of others and do what they can to ensure that everyone who contacts them is able to receive a safe abortion, regardless of reason, citizenship, socioeconomic status, etc.

Furthermore, the Ciocia collectives are working collaboratively to achieve their goals. In relying on one another they are able to work efficiently and resourcefully. Although leaving the final decision to the individual seeking an abortion, the collectives are informed on the laws of the respective countries of each group, allowing them to direct and provide specified advice to everyone who contacts them. Whether someone be in the South of Poland, late in their pregnancy, or are simply seeking abortion pills to be sent to their home in Poland, the Ciocia collectives have a plethora of organizations to point them towards, or contact on behalf of them. In many ways, this network is informal and created through more casual dialogue between groups, however; formalized connections such as the Abortion Without Borders network do exist. Jessica shares, “I don’t think that support networks have ever been as support as now... we already have so much information and we’re much more organized”. Support for another is voiced through social media activity such as reposting, tagging, etc., and sometimes best practices are shared with one another when a group is first starting out. Despite finances being kept separate from one another and country jurisdiction dictating laws, borders between the Ciocia collectives can be easily blurred when it comes to finding adequate care for someone in need.

In conclusion, as discussed, having other people to rely on is highly beneficial for the Ciocia collectives. Not only can one collective rely on another, but the individuals within the collective

can also support each other in various ways through the stress and emotional turmoil that is commonly endured while doing this work. Members can experience frustration directed from those they help, as these individuals regularly walk the line between expectation and entitlement. They have created a supportive environment which enables members to have compassion for one another and help each other through the struggle. Whether it be venting in a group chat or sitting down with a counselor together, the possibility for relief is there. For many it seems that simply knowing they are not alone and well supported is enough to get them through the difficulties sometimes experienced while organizing abortions. While discussing this Hana insightfully shares,

You know, there's a saying in German, 'geteiltes lied, ist halbes leid', so, shared pain is half a pain. So even if everything is going... it's worsening and worsening, sharing it with a group, it makes everything easier. So, every challenge, we tried to... we somehow managed because we were a group.

### 5.3 Limitations

A major limitation of this study is the small sample size. In total I conducted three interviews and spoke with four different people. This was a result of a combination of factors, one being my own time constraints, and the other being the availability of the volunteers of the Ciocia collectives. As a researcher, I was limited in the amount of time I had to conduct the interviews as I was forced to schedule everything around my work schedule and allow ample time for writing. Each interview was quite lengthy, lasting between one to two hours, and provided a great amount of material to transcribe. Although all interesting, the vast amount of information shared partially limited our ability to fully dive into one particular topic for an extended amount of time. Nearly every piece of information shared was new, complex, or required additional information. At certain times, I felt as if we could have had an entirely separate interview focusing on a brief point mentioned by one of the interviewees, but we did not have the opportunity to.

The participants were also constrained by time as they are constantly having to balance work, school, and volunteering obligations. Especially for the collectives that are struggling already to fill volunteer shifts related to abortion organizing, volunteering for interviews drops in the list of priorities. Due to these factors, I was unable to conduct multiple interviews with volunteers from each collective. This created a situation in which one, or in the case of Ciocia Basia, two, individuals were forced to speak on behalf of the entire collective. Although it was made clear that I was interested in individual motivations and opinions, their answers were extrapolated and conclusions were drawn about the collective as a whole. The limited sample of participants restricts how applicable these conclusions are, however, because similarities and overlap were found between three different groups in three different countries, I am confident that the findings are still significant to an extent. I interviewed members from each collective separately and yet similar answers were given to many questions, creating corresponding themes throughout. These themes were mapped despite the fact that each collective operates completely independently from one another and face issues unique to their respective country.

#### 5.4 Future Recommendations

Therefore, when considering the possibility of future related studies, I would recommend to expand the sample size and interview multiple people from each collective either individually or in a group setting. While this desire was present before conducting my interviews, I now feel even stronger that this is necessary due to learning that volunteers may play different roles in certain collectives. For instance, one member may be responsible for answering emails, another for fundraising, and someone else may only serve as a host, offering their private homes as accommodation for those traveling from Poland to receive an abortion. These different roles will surely lead to different experiences while volunteering at the collective and subsequently different answers and opinions. My recommendation would be to clearly outline each role present in the collective and request to interview an individual from each area. If possible, multiple people from each area to compare experiences.

Continuing with expansion, I would also recommend to include collectives and even formalized groups that are separate from the Ciocia collectives. As I began my research I continued to

discover more and more groups which I previously had never heard of beforehand. As discussed, there is a wide range of informal collectives, NGO's, and others which operate all across Europe working to provide safe abortions to those in need. While the list to choose from seems near endless, my recommendation would be to focus on Abortion Without Borders and its affiliates. This would provide a concrete network to examine which would offer findings unique to formalized and informal groups, as well as groups which are officially linked. It would be of great interest to learn about how these groups support one another and what benefits or limitations being a part of such a network entails.

Lastly, I think it would also be of great interest to compare the experiences of an informal collective, such as one of the Ciocia collectives, and an official NGO that works to organize cross-border abortions. As some of the Ciocia collectives voiced possible interest in becoming formalized in the future, it would be beneficial for them to learn about any similarities or differences experienced between the two. Not only may some better practices be learned, but the findings may even help to determine where resources could be allocated to in order to create a sustainable working environment. For instance, it would be of use to compare experiences of burnout when having to work under paid conditions versus unpaid, or the amount of stress experienced in an organized environment versus unorganized. By having direct access to this insight, I believe the Ciocia collectives would be able to make their decision about becoming formalized or not more easily, or at least have comparable data to refer to.

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**Informed Consent Form**

Please read the below description of this study and sign the consent form if you would like to voluntarily participate.

**Thesis title:** When reproductive rights are criminalized: cross-border abortions and a case study of the Ciocia Collectives

**Institution:** Faculty of Humanities, Charles University

**Researcher:** Savannah Catalina

**Purpose of the study:** This research aims to highlight that the criminalization of reproductive rights is an international issue that requires cross-border activism. The case study of the Ciocia Collectives will be used to examine current efforts of organizations to provide reproductive care transnationally including abortions. The interviews will help to understand the organization of the collectives, their motivations, their needs, and any barriers they currently face.

**Interview Procedure:** Interviews will take place online via Google Meet or in person. The location and time will be decided prior to the interview. The interview should last between 60-90 minutes. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed.

**Voluntary Participation:** Participation in this research is completely voluntary. At any point, the participant may choose to pause or stop the interview. Participants may refuse to answer any question. During or after the interview participants reserve the right to retract or revise their answers.

**Confidentiality:** All research participants will be given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Unless requested otherwise, the collectives will be explicitly named in the research. Recordings and transcriptions will only be used for this research project and will not be shared with any outside sources.

**I have read and understand the above description of this research project. I voluntarily agree to be interviewed for this research project and give consent for my answers to be shared.**

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**Participant Printed Name**

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**Participant Signature**

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**Date**

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**Interviewer Printed Name**

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**Interviewer Signature**

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**Date**

**Contact Information:**

**For any questions or concerns you can contact the Interviewer directly at [savanahcatalina@gmail.com](mailto:savanahcatalina@gmail.com) or +420 775 186 720.**

**Thesis Advisor: Vera Sokolova - [vera.sokolova@fhs.cuni.cz](mailto:vera.sokolova@fhs.cuni.cz)**

**General / icebreaker questions:**

1. How long have you been with Ciocia Czesia?
2. What is your role or title? Main responsibilities?
3. When was Ciocia Czesia started? By who?
4. How would you describe what Ciocia Czesia is?
5. Why was it created, what are the main goals of the organization?

**Abortion Missions**

1. How do people reach out to you, find you? What role does social media?
2. Are they only contacting you to arrange an abortion?
3. Can you outline the process of an abortion mission?
  - a. What method of abortion is most frequently used?
4. How is Ciocia Czesia funded? What does the money go to mostly?
5. Are you able to help everyone who reaches out to you?
  - a. If not, how do you decide who will be offered support?
6. What people do you specifically help? Only from Poland?

**Obstacles**

1. Have you faced any unexpected obstacles?
2. Have you faced any resistance? From who and in what ways? \
3. Outside of that, what are the biggest issues the Ciocia is Prague faces?
4. What resources are needed most?

**Legal details**

1. Have you run into any legal problems?
2. Is there anything unique in Czech law that allows you to offer aid? Any challenges Czech law poses?
3. Are you familiar with Justyana Wydrzynska, a member of Abortion without Borders, who was recently charged with aiding in abortion after giving an abortion pill to another woman?
  - a. What did this case reveal? did it change how you operate in any way?

### **Organization questions**

1. Is it fair to say Ciocia Czesia is informal?
2. How large of an operation is it? Volunteer-based?
3. Are there leaders?
4. Do you have organized meetings? How often?
5. Is there a vetting process for joining?
6. Does any training take place?
7. Do you have any services for your members? Counseling
8. Are you all close / friendly?

### **Collaboration**

4. How does Ciocia Czesia work with other collectives around the world, particularly Ciocia collectives in Berlin and Vienna?
5. Is Ciocia Czesia apart of any larger abortion networks, abortion without borders?
6. Are you happy with the collaboration? Could it be improved?
7. What do you believe could be improved for the collective to operate more efficiently? What changes are needed?

### **Personal Motivations**

1. What inspired you to start working with Ciocia Czesia?
2. Have there been any particularly hard moments for you?
3. What motivates you to continue to do this work?

### **Closing**

4. What is in store for the future?
5. How can people offer support both in the Czech Republic and Abroad?
6. Is there any topic I missed that you wish we would have touched on? Is there anything you would like to add or clarify?