

Scott-Kloeck Jenson Pre-Dissertation Travel Fellowship
Field Report for Summer 2023

Thanks to the Scott Kloeck-Jenson Pre-Dissertation Travel Fellowship, I was able to travel to Poland in the summer of 2023, where I spent two months conducting historical research for my dissertation. My project focuses on the idea of conscious motherhood (*świadome macierzyństwo*), which describes practices of birth control and family planning, as well as the accompanying movement to propagate contraceptive knowledge throughout Polish society. During this trip, I was particularly interested in any materials pertaining to the Polish Society for Conscious Motherhood, an organization which emerged during the communist Polish People's Republic (1947-1989) to promote reproductive health, sexual education, and family planning.

While abroad, I visited a number of archives and libraries throughout the country. My trip began in Kraków, where I ultimately spent three weeks. While I was there, I browsed the collections of the National Archive and the Jagiellonian Library. The National Archive houses documents from the Kraków chapter of the Polish Society for Conscious Motherhood, wherein I discovered a large volume of administrative records dating back to the chapter's emergent years (roughly 1959-1970). At the Jagiellonian Library, I found a fascinating collection of the Society's earlier publications, including educational leaflets addressed to a broad section of Polish society—young women, soldiers, medical professionals, parents. These booklets provide an insightful glance into the Society's postwar origins, its mission and goals, as well as its earliest attempts to distribute knowledge on topics such as birth control, motherhood, and sex education.

Following this, I spent three weeks in Warsaw, during which I studied several archival and library collections housed at the Central Archives of Modern Records, the National Library, and the University of Warsaw. Thanks to the help of archivists at the Central Archives, I was able to analyze a variety of records pertaining to the Society, including press clippings and government dossiers. Additionally, I was delighted to come across ephemera related to the Society in both the National Library and the University of Warsaw Library—in particular, several pamphlets published by the Society in the late 1950s, which I had read about during my research in Kraków. These pamphlets exemplify some of the Society's earliest publications and outreach efforts. However, my most exciting finding happened at the National Library, where I discovered a collection of the Society's multi-disciplinary journal, *Family Issues (Problemy Rodziny)*. Published bi-monthly from 1961 until 2001, the journal provides a fascinating insight into the concerns and activities of the Polish Society for Conscious Motherhood and constitutes an expansive record of the Society's historical development.

In addition to conducting research in these two cities, I also spent a week at the State Archives in Kielce and Katowice, respectively. While my findings here were not as gainful as in Warsaw and Kraków, I was nevertheless able to access a few records pertaining to the local chapters of the Society, which demonstrated the unique challenges faced by conscious motherhood activists seeking to promulgate birth control in smaller towns.

During my trip, I was profoundly reminded of the significance and implications of my research topic. The issues of abortion and birth control have always been contentious, and this is particularly true in Poland following the country's near ban on legal abortion in late 2020. While I was staying in Warsaw in late July, these issues once again re-entered the public consciousness after a woman named Joanna came forward, alleging that she was victimized and humiliated by the Kraków police, after authorities were notified of her recent abortion. Earlier this year, Joanna had a legal, self-administered medication abortion. A week following this, her psychiatrist ordered a wellness check without the woman's knowledge, upon which police officers searched Joanna's apartment and escorted her to the hospital. There, she was forced to undergo a gynecological exam, and subjected to harsh and humiliating interrogation as police demanded she give up her phone, and strip naked, squat, and cough. While the police officers involved insist that their concerns were purely with her physical and psychological safety, Joanna herself claims that she was the subject of intense scrutiny and hostility surrounding her abortion. After Joanna's story came to light, protests broke out throughout Poland; unfortunately, I was no longer in the city, and therefore missed the main demonstration that took place in Kraków. I did, however, attend a smaller protest in Warsaw, where nearly one hundred people gathered in support of Joanna. While there, I had the opportunity to listen to, and speak with, some inspiring activists who are working tirelessly to decriminalize and destigmatize abortion in Poland, and expand much-needed access to abortion information and medication. Participating in this demonstration brought the contemporary relevance of my project in stark relief and proved to be a great source of inspiration for the rest of my trip.

My time in Poland was incredibly fruitful and productive. Not only was I able to conduct an initial survey of the materials that will constitute the foundation of my dissertation, but I was also able to scan a multitude of records and come up with several new lines of inquiry, which will allow me to start my project as soon as I complete my preliminary exams. Moreover, I was able to establish contact with several groups that focus on reproductive rights; being able to speak to these activists will ensure that my work is not only relevant, but instrumental, in the contemporary struggle for abortion rights in Poland. This was all possible due to the generous support of the SKJ Fellowship, for which I am incredibly thankful.