Can childfreedom be seen as an act of resistance?
An analysis of its effects on individual identity and the norm.
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Abstract

This thesis explores untheorized themes of pronatalism and childfreedom in Lithuania. Through an analysis of interviews of childfree women, I show the prevalence of a pronatalist norm in Lithuanian society, and how it’s challenged by the phenomenon of childfreedom. I examine women’s paths to childfreedom, the normative pressure they experience, and their views of their position. Pronatalist pressure transforms, when challenged by childfreedom, and especially when it is openly declared. I show that pronatalism is not easily challenged and childfreedom impacts both - the norm and the women, transgressing it. I argue that childfreedom can be seen as an act of resistance to the pronatalist norm, yet this view is restricted by significant limitations.
Introduction

Globally rising political tensions and heightened right wing initiatives are alarmingly evoking memories of authoritarian realities. Relatively all groups, except perhaps the evermore fortunate wealthy white straight males, witness attacks on their rights. Popularity of Donald Trump’s sexist, xenophobic statements in the US, Viktor Orban administration’s and Polish Law and Justice party’s - in Europe are just some examples of worrying trends. Attempts to delegalize abortion in Poland, where the regulations are already extremely strict is frighteningly close to Lithuanian context, where newly elected right wing majority openly declares attempts to invest in traditional values. The Lithuanian Peasant and Greens Union (LVŽS), the biggest part of the new government, declares pronatalist intentions and strengthening family institution, based on heterosexual marriage\(^1\). Furthermore the ideological trends of the new government are expressed in an interview by LVŽS representative, newly elected head of Parliamentary Health committee\(^2\) Agnė Širinskienė, claiming that “the elected government is ready to implement a program, based on Christian humanism”\(^3\).

In this climate, historical advances on women’s position once again face a backlash with attacks on right to personal and bodily sovereignty. The battles that seemed to have been won by the feminist of first and second waves are creeping up on us once again. The ordeal of proving women’s membership to humanity, and thus human rights, is surfacing as painfully resistless. Many of us, younger generation western feminists, stand in terror as we are forced to fight the same fights as our mothers and even grandmothers already won. Or so we thought. Such phrases as my body, my choice and women’s rights are human rights are still painfully relevant as they are being questioned and are best expressed by what have become a social media meme - an elderly woman, standing with a poster, reading “I can’t believe I still have to protest this shit”.

However while a wave of extreme restrictions to human rights is being highly debated, protested and perceptible for both – its advocates and opposition, such expressions are only the tip of the

\(^1\) [http://www.lvzs.lt/lt/](http://www.lvzs.lt/lt/)
\(^2\) Lietuvos valstiečių ir žaliųjų sąjungos (LVŽS) atstovė, Seimo Sveikatos reikalų komiteto pirmininkė
While feminists express our astonishment and outrage of the rise of direct attempts to bring a woman back to a position of an incubator, comparing it with fascist and Stalinist measures, a latent pronatal incentive has always been and still is an inherent part of any nation state. A survival of a nation state is based on generational shift and thus a certain amount of births (Finkle & McIntosh 1979; van de Kaa 2006; Heitlinger 1991 etc.). A modern capitalist society we live in is directly dependent on the production of babies and this precondition has an inevitable bearing on the producers - women.

Attempts to increase population by legislative tools - state pronatalism, features totalitarian measures, such as abortion and contraception ban, and marks the most visible, extreme end of the spectrum. However pronatalism is executed through many different forms, some of which are seen as almost indisputably positive. Support for mothers and families, tax deductions for parents, creation of children-friendly spaces and culture, together with many other pronatal incentives, are innocently framed as family policies and family support (Heitlinger 1991; van de Kaa 2006; McIntosh 1986; Stankūnių, et al. 2013; Maslauskaitė 2005; etc.). Heitlinger in her extensive work Pronatalism and women's equality policies classifies pronatalist measures into three main groups: “(1) coercive policies limiting access to abortion or contraception or both, (2) facilitative measures associated with the social protection of motherhood, and (3) positive fiscal incentives” (1991: 353 original emphases). Heitlinger separates the first kind - coercive pronatalism, as associated with authoritarianism and eugenics, and incompatible with gender equality. Such framing creates a clear distinction between the bad (coercive) and the good (non-coercive, mild, supportive) pronatalism to an extent where a term itself is relatively forgotten and used almost only in a historical context (Heitlinger 1991).

Pronatalism is viewed as a tool of totalitarian regimes (Finkle & McIntosh 1979: 278-281), used by Nazis, and today in Europe women are free to choose career, motherhood or combining the two and beyond. But are they? Furthermore, are they free to refuse? Given that they are the sole producers of nations, men and society as a whole, is it easily believable that in the global patriarchy the decision of reproduction is solely a woman’s choice? In a spirit of democratic values any obedient, good citizen is expected to answer yes. Any other answer would undermine our trust in the democratic system, supposedly built on the protection of individual freedom.
However, this answer is preconditioned by a belief, that given this free choice most women will take the option of becoming mothers. If one started questioning this premise, one of the two - democratic freedom of choice, or the social system - gets fundamentally shaken. Fearing the latter, we as a society, cling to the idea of a happy mother and even the most liberal political forces attempt to persuade us that given the right circumstances most women will choose to be mothers. Economic and social conditions are most often seen as either hindering or supporting a realisation of an already existing unquestionable longing for a child (Stankūnienė et al. 2013; Stankūnienė et al. 2009; McIntosh 1986).

The aim of the research

While women take up diverse positions in the society, their position as mothers remains central. Increasingly well accommodated and shared with men, reproductive function is inevitably important as it perpetually creates the material body of what we call society. This process is generally taken for granted as an inevitable, natural, and thus unquestionable. Traditionally desire to have children is seen as constitutive for all, but somewhat optional for men, while being central to women. The feminist fight for gender equality has gained women the option to prioritise other roles, combining it with motherhood. However, while the freedom to define oneself through options other than child bearing is real for many women, motherhood remains one of the key points. In other words, additions have been made and hierarchy of choices loosened, but is motherhood no longer the obligatory ingredient on the menu? What happens when motherhood becomes/is considered to be one of the options, or gets rejected, opted-out? What are the effects and consequences of such a choice for women, the normative society, and how can they be analysed from a feminist perspective?

In this thesis I attempt to analyse a choice of rejecting motherhood through a lens of feminist resistance. I will look at the interrelation between a person taking the decision and the society. Using in depth interviews I aim to show authentic women’s experiences from their own point of view, enable vocalisation of otherwise bodily act, and, while doing so, offer a voice to a diverse group, which is otherwise represented in Lithuania only through statistics, and negative speculations in popular media. Through analysis of the testimonies I will demonstrate the pronatalist norm and its effects to the childfree women. Moreover, I will explore the decision to
remain childfree: how it affects the very women, how they see their childfreedom, and what ripples it creates in the society. Answering what effects childfreedom has on self-identities of the informants and the pronatalist norm are the main questions, which I will explore throughout my work. Finally, provoking the liberal idea of gender equality, I will discuss and answer the question whether my informants’ rejection of motherhood can be seen as an act of resistance; and what might be its limitations.

The structure of the research

In order to reach my aims, identified above, I will start by positioning myself in relation to my topic. I will then present current demographic trends and state pronatalism in Lithuania as well as previous research done on the topics of pronatalism and childfreedom. Theoretical approach will be presented thereafter, together with the main concepts and my intended use of it. I will finalise introductory section of my work by accounting for ethical and methodological background of my conducted empirical research.

There from I will begin my analysis, which is divided in three parts - two based on empirical research and the last one – a deeper theoretical discussion, incorporating empirical findings. In the first part of analysis I show how pronatalist normativity is embedded in our society, and how my informants experience it from the moment of first thought on a topic of procreation, to the decision of childfreedom and reasons for their choice. I explore inner dialogues as shared by the childfree women as well as reactions, pressure and clashes with their surroundings.

The second part sheds light on how my subjects perceive their childfreedom. Their construction of identity, connected to their childfreedom, and their view on society as well as the effects of their actions are explored. Finally, in the last part of my work I combine extracted accents and tendencies from the testimonies in the first two parts with conceptual theoretical perspectives. I examine childfreedom of a concrete localised group of women through a grid of theoretical analyses. In this part childfreedom is positioned in relation to resistance and limitations of such positioning are explored. I finalise my work by answering my research question and offering conclusions as well as wishes for a possible further research.
Self-positioning

My view as a researcher, towards my work and towards my informants is one from within - I am myself voluntarily childfree. Being one of childfree women, I meet my own criteria for an informant. My inner dialogue about my childfreedom hadn’t given me peace of mind and evolved into an academic interest. Consequently, I navigate my position in my everyday life and relationships, as well as analyse it in my thesis. I thus feel a need to share my road towards and beyond a decision to not reproduce, as writing this work is a step in it. Furthermore, my personal experiences have led me to form viewpoints and ideas, which have been enriched and challenged by the academia, to a point where I cannot retrospectively distinguish my first hand reactions. However, the emotional traces of my experiences are built in the foundations of my academically informed positions, and I feel that failing to address them would be superficial at best, and deceitful at a worst.

Compulsory heterosexuality, often discussed by the feminist authors, wasn’t the main expression of normativity, invading my life. The discourse of compulsory reproduction was. From my teen years I constantly heard from my mother that women in our family are not very fertile, so I have to take good care of my health to make sure I don’t jeopardise my ability to have children. I was told not to become sexually active too early, as, according to my mother, many partners reduce a chance of a healthy purebred baby and the future father wouldn’t love it as much if it wasn’t completely his; I was not to take contraceptive pills as they supposedly might reduce future chances to conceive; I was to dress warm as not to get an infection, which could lead to reduced fertility. Once I got married the discourse changed into “so when is it going to happen”, later “what are you waiting for”, “hurry or it might be too late” after some years “there are natural remedies that help to conceive” and finally “if it’s not meant it’s not meant, but you shouldn’t lose hope”.

None of the conversations were reciprocal - I had always, from the pre-teens, when gender role play starts being important, made my aversion of children clear to those around me. It got always packed in a late bloomer excuse and “you’ll drop this nonsense as you get older”. Going through teenage rebellion I would respond to my parents’ pressure by saying that I’ll adopt a Roma child (Roma people being the most hated minority in Lithuania) and raise it with a woman. My parents
always took it as a nasty joke. I wasn’t actually joking at that point. I never joked about these matters with my parents, they just refused to believe I was being serious. How could my mother believe her precious firstborn, which she struggled to conceive and later to raise in a full family, fighting with a far from a perfect husband, illness connected to child-rearing and lack of money, wasn’t going to experience the miracle of motherhood? Her life project, aim and happiness refusing to validate her choices.

As my mother was my first environment in all the possible meanings – the womb, the warmth, the home, she was the first pronatal agent, whose pressure I experienced emotionally and physically; and had to deal with it through all my senses, rationality and emotions. We were not very close with my mother, I have always been an independent child, keeping my parents on what I considered a need to know basis. My mother was, however, a point of departure, which conditioned me to notice the signs of pronatalism in my environment, as reacting to them had become a part of my everyday life. The constant pressure ignoring my arguments caused only anger. I was pushed in a position I didn’t like and my opinion wasn’t heard. I took it as an attack on my developing autonomy. From my perspective, my subjectivity was being breached, and thus my rejections of the pressure became increasingly more graceless.

My teenage self didn’t consider my mother’s view on the topic the way I do now. I currently understand her behaviour to have been a rejection of a painful reality, in which her biggest ambition for her child was doomed, moreover devalued. I now realise the cruelty we both experienced as well as unwittingly executed towards each other in these constant interactions. Yet, these same interactions did destroy the invisibility of everyday pronatalism. The intensity and constancy of the pressure conditioned me to notice and react to pronatalism, hereby inverting its effects.

Heteronormativity for me was a firm, yet much less aggressive background feature of pronatalism. It was mostly seen in my environment as an automatic precondition for the ultimate goal of motherhood. Perhaps, because in my younger years I never had a need or a chance to back my rejections in reality. I never happened to bring a girlfriend home to my parents, I haven’t participated in a Gay Pride parade (there were none in Lithuania at that time), and while my parents saw the tangibility of my childlessness, I never gave them any proof of my talks.
about non-heterosexuality.

While my views developed in a direction of system-critical queerness, my lifestyle had a fairly normative appearance. Having a husband and an education, only a child separated me from accomplishing normative womanhood. Once I divorced my husband, the direct verbal pressure to conceive reduced. However, neighbours, relatives and acquaintances felt entitled to enquire about my personal life and took my reluctance to talk as a sign that my failed marriage was a result of childlessness. While encouragements and comments from my immediate environment lessened, the more material signs and broader social agendas became even clearer. As I entered a nonheterosexual relationship, heteronormativity suddenly invaded my scope of vision as an element of increased relevance, yet still connected to pronatalism. Pictures of heterosexual couples or happy mothers with children in media, adds, a clinic; suggestions by a doctor to conceive as a remedy to a medical problem, because “sooner or later you’ll have to anyway, so why not now?”; targeted ads for children’s toys and breast pumps and reappearing assumption of my regretful failure to conceive. I have deserted the norm, but it didn’t forsake me, only its persistence seems as alien as never before. I see none of myself in the images I am bombarded with, and their invading omnipresence echoes my mother’s grousing.

**Current situation and pronatalist policies in Lithuania**

The context I have chosen for my research is Lithuania. It is a country where I have lived most of my life. However, my academic interest in voluntary childlessness and pronatalism developed while I was studying and working in Scandinavia. My primary perspective comes from analysing Scandinavian state maternalism (Lewis J. & Åström G. 1992; Leira A. 2006; Herman S. 1992) and I recognize that my knowledge of local context might have shortcomings. However, this research is partly an attempt to deepen my knowledge of the topic in a Lithuanian context. I will thus review current demographic situation and the research related to my topic done by the local scholars.

Considering general demographic context, Lithuania experiences the same trends as most European countries. Aging population, low birth rate, increasing age of the first birth, weakening of marriage institution and high percentage of divorce are tendencies typical to most European countries. Concrete Lithuanian demographic data show declining birth rate since the last decade
of the 20th century (Stankūnienė, et al. 2013; Stankūnienė, et al. 2009; Maslauskaitė, 2005). According to the authors above, birth rate, being tied to radical political and economic changes decreased quite rapidly. The transformation period into the free market economy had caused a baby scarcity to occur in East and Centre European countries at a similar time, however, much later than in West and North Europe (Stankūnienė, Maslauskaitė, Baublytė 2013). The changes brought about by Lithuanian independence and a sudden shift into free market economy overwhelmed many aspects of Lithuanian political and social life, including reproduction.

Research done by Aušra Maslauskaitė show that since 1990 the birth rate of Lithuania decreased, and the increase of childless couples and individuals is identified as a growing phenomenon (Maslauskaitė 2005). The author also mentions voluntary childlessness as a “increasing, yet not a very prominent fact” (2005: 12). Maslauskaitė analyses low birth rate through sociological surveys, showing that people express desires to have more children, than they get in reality, thus, the author suggests, improved pronatalist policies have a potential to increase birth rate (ibid: 14).

The situation where less women chose to give birth, they do it at an older age and give birth to fewer children, moreover, more children are brought up by cohabitating couples instead of married ones, is presented as problematic (ibid). The question of children is thus addressed not only on individual, but on a national level through family policy. Lithuanian academics, working with demographic and social research name pronatalism as one of the main objectives of historical as well as current family policy (Stankūnienė et al. 2013). Authors point out that economic incentives of the Soviet era period until 1982 clearly show pronatalist objectives, even though they are not openly declared; while during the period after 1982 (up till the end of Soviet era) a concern regarding demographic situation was clearly articulated and policies supporting reproduction were expanded (ibid: 16-18).

Introducing current family policy authors draw attention to supranational trends and policies, pointing out that concerns regarding demographic situation as well as pronatalist incentives aren’t directly articulated, but can clearly be seen through analysis and evaluation (ibid: 18). Regarding nation level family policies after Lithuanian independence in 1990, the main feature is named to be eclectic effort to reach a compromise between the old and the new regime
(Stankūnienė, et al. 2013) and radical shifts in types and priorities, depending on a ruling political force (Stankūnienė, et al. 2009: 91-99). National revival and family values, according to Stankūnienė, Maslauskaitė & Baublytė were the foundation for the further family policy creation (2013: 45). In 1996 a turn to a modern family policy occurs as Concept of a State Family Policy was ratified (Stankūnienė et al. 2009).

All the mentioned authors conclude that even though on a conceptual level Lithuanian family policy has had some positive developments, little of it translated into real life changes due to already mentioned constant political shifts and conflicting short-sighted policies. Furthermore, according to Stankūnienė (2013), the declared pronatalist incentives didn’t materialise and don’t have a potential to.

The surveyed authors limit their work to a demographic research with a general purpose to identify shortcomings in the current policies. No critical evaluation of the underlying standpoint or broader socio-political influence of either the pronatal initiatives or their failure is examined. Neither do authors address the potential effects of the policies in the formation of public discourse. Since there is no concrete research done in Lithuania, examining the connection between state legislated pronatalism and everyday pronatalism, expressed through interpersonal social interactions, it is difficult to make suggestions on how strongly one influences the other. I do, however, suggest that governments’ legislations on family policies are connected to respective governments’ general priorities; and as the parliament is democratically elected, these priorities are likely to roughly reflect the views of a substantial part of the Lithuanian population.

**Previous research**

Previous research done on my topic can be roughly divided into those analysing pronatalism and those, exploring childfreedom. While, as I mention above, coercive pronatalism is most often seen as a historical occurrence of totalitarian regimes (Finkle & McIntosh 1979: 278-281), non-coercive pronatalism is often viewed as state maternalism, expressed through social and family support (Heitlinger 1991; van de Kaa 2006; King 2000; McIntosh 1986).

Different authors explore and assess pronatalist measures (van de Kaa 2006; McIntosh 1986) and their influence on women’s position in the society (Heitlinger 1991). In her work *Pronatalism*
and Women's Equality Policies. Heitlinger uses a general De Sandre’s concept, describing pronatalism as a policy that promotes childbirth and parenthood by all legal means (1991: 344). It is worth noting that the sociological distinction between coercive and non-coercive pronatalism (Heitlinger 1991), while accurate for setting aside directly forceful measures employed at times by state regimes, isn’t as clear when looked at from a feminist perspective. Furthermore, while I review pronatal policies and trends in Lithuania in an attempt to establish an overall pronatalist background, my work isn’t focused on Lithuanian state pronatalism. Thus, while I find sociological sources useful for presenting international as well as national trends for my analysis, I will be relying more on broader-themed works of gender scholars.

Reviewing contributions to the subject of pronatalism from the discipline of Gender Studies isn’t easy. Partly due to the already mentioned dissolution of the term into other, much broader questions of family policy, support for families, family planning and others. Furthermore, as gender scholars analyse all angles of gendered oppression and its reverberance, pronatalism as a theme, in different forms penetrates relatively every discussion. The term in its broader sense encapsulates different forms of control over women’s corporeality and subjectivity, and these are the main general areas feminist authors explore. Therefore, I will not engage in a long and superficial process of reviewing all this work, and instead use the following subchapter for distinguishing feminist strands and authors, whose contribution I find most relevant to my work.

The second theme, I explore in my thesis - childfreedom is identified as a relatively new but growing phenomenon in western countries, having an influence on a construction of contemporary womanhood (Gillespie 2000; 2003; Hird & Abshof 2000). While the research on pronatalism, overviewed above, generally sees childfreedom as problematic, and consequently pronatal incentives as addressing the problem; most authors, exploring childfreedom, suggest a different perspective. The connection of motherhood and womanhood is explored by Hird & Abshoff (2000) and Kelly (2009), furthermore, childfreedom is analysed as constitutive in new female identity, disconnected from motherhood and based on self-realisation and personal freedom (Gillespie 2000; Peterson 2015; Wood & Newton 2006).

Considering the specific context of Lithuania, there are no published works on childfreedom. Consequently, as I mentioned before, the phenomenon is only approached in a context of
demographic research. One attempt to engage with the topic in Lithuania is done by Leonavičiūtė, as a master thesis in sociology (2012). The author notes the pioneering nature of her work and devotes it to set the ground for further research, emphasizing, that childfreedom is a relatively new and thus under-theorised, but growing occurrence.

As the numbers of childfree women increase, so does the analysis done on the topic. For now, however, there is a lack of work, exploring, as I do, the interaction between current social pressure to reproduce and women refusing to comply. Thus, I suggest that my work offers new insights in both - presenting the depth of still persistent pronatalism, and approaching childfreedom in relation to it. Finally, there are numerous works (as I review above) done in Lithuania on the topic of low fertility as a problem, yet no published research is done on childfreedom. Therefore, my work could offer an alternative perspective, and contribute to de-stigmatization of childfreedom.

**Theories and concepts**

In order to theorise and contextualise my empirical research, I use several theoretical strands and concepts. I will shortly present them here. As the main themes of my work are pronatalism and childfreedom, I will start by presenting these concepts the way I see them, and then continue with my theoretical approach.

Firstly, I use a term pronatalism. Alena Heitlinger broadly describes pronatalism as “encouragement of all births as conducive to individual, family and social well-being” (1991: 344). This broad notion is later specified, distinguishing coercive and non-coercive pronatalism, state (legislative) pronatalism and socio-cultural. As I mention in the subchapter above, I am concerned with the latter, socio-cultural pronatalism, that is embedded in the social organization of our lives, and thus while the term pronatalism is mostly used in analysis of state pronatalism (Heitlinger 1991; van de Kaa 2006; McIntosh 1986; etc.), I employ it to describe broader motherhood-connected pressure, experienced by women.

Childfreedom is another term, crucial to my work. Firstly, when talking about voluntary non reproduction, different authors use *childlessness* and *childfreedom* as well as other terms to describe the same occurrence. The latter term - childfreedom doesn’t have the connotation of
loss, as does the term childlessness (Peterson & Engwall 2013; Peterson 2015). While childfreedom is criticised for positive, rather than neutral associations with the phenomenon of choosing not to have children (ibid.), I find it appropriate for my work, as my view towards the occurrence is openly, although not uncritically, positive.

Furthermore, I find it important to note, that the variety of terms, used to describe not having children, is not corresponded by terms, available for naming its logical opposition - motherhood. Motherhood, as opposed to non-motherhood, doesn’t have options to express voluntarism or involuntarism. In other words, while terms used to describe a choice to not have children are various and with different implications; a notion of motherhood is unambiguous. Childfreedom is used to mark voluntary chosen non-reproduction, yet there is no term for involuntary motherhood. Thus, while conceptually childfreedom is a term with most positive connotations to the phenomenon I explore, juxtapositioned with a term, used for having children, it still is problematic with an inherent notion of deviance. Finally, however, the etymology of the available terms point to motherhood as an unquestioned norm, and thus the pronatalist hegemony, which I explore throughout my work.

The theoretical approaches I use are connected with the two main threads, mentioned above. Having initially started my work from eye-opening thoughts in Lee Edelman’s book No Future (2004), I use his insights to establish the context, childfreedom occurs in. The author’s argument of the entire social order being based on an ever present idea of future child, and a heterosexual alibi as an instrument to maintain this order, is indispensable. The author names queer as a resistant notion and counter-positions it to what he calls reproductive futurism (Edelman 2004). While I am not concerned with queer as a sexual orientation, Edelman’s definition allows a broader understanding of the concept. To expand Edelman’s views, I use Sara Ahmed’s insights on queer phenomenology and normativity. Through Edelman’s and to some extent Ahmed’s writings I employ queer theory as one of the tools to establish heterosexual pronatalist hegemony and analyse childfreedom as a possible discursive antidote to it.

Another strand of theories I use, emphasize the body. Analysing a phenomenon, which is based on bodily facticity of female reproductive capacities, I cannot ignore its pre-discursive features. Only one part of human population has a unique bodily capacity to produce human beings, and
an absolute majority of it is women. Thus, even though I agree with Foucault’s view of subjectivity as “constructed through discourses that are in effect in society” (Lykke 2010: 90), I employ sexual difference theorists, who argue that ignoring bodily facticity draws us back to the universal male subject and thus phallocentric order (Lykke 2010: 102-103). Writings of Irigaray (1985; 1993) are especially important as she addresses sexual difference largely through its construction in classical sciences, especially psychoanalysis. Irigaray's works, with additions from feminist psychoanalysts, and already mentioned contributions from queer theory, create a basis for analysing an establishment of pronatalist hegemony, which I argue is basis for the society. Finally, I use some insides of feminist corpomaterialists (Lykke 2010: 107) to emphasize the importance of a body. Childfreedom is essentially a bodily act (or a refusal of an act), contra-positioned to pronatalism - a discourse, and thus both - discourse and matter, are important in my work.

Regarding the body as crucial but not deterministic entity for subjection of women, I continue my work by theorising the powers, which are attempting to limit and compel women to their flesh. Through Foucault’s theorising and its feminist appropriations, I analyse the structures behind pronatalism, and see it in a way that both Foucault and sexual difference theorists do - as employing sciences for the purpose of utilisation of women (Irigaray 1985; 1993; Sawicki 1991; Foucault 1980).

Using Foucault, I see power as brutal, yet not absolute; appropriating, yet not creating its tools of oppression; consequently, resistance - as a constant possibility, and thus potential to gain certain power. Resistance for Foucault plays a crucial role in power dynamics. It limits the power and keeps it from total domination, thus allowing multiplicities to exist. Foucauldian resistance includes, yet is not limited to refusal. It encompasses many different grassroots expressions, and while it can grow and reach major transformations, it can never be based on a grand theory, as such theory, according to the author, would be totalitarian (1982). The two features – power and resistance, building on Foucauldian thought, are not only co-dependent and in a constant struggle, but also multiple and constructing possibly conflicting identities in each individual subject.

Finally, while analysing the interviews, it became clear, that materialist feminist analysis is
necessary in addressing not only structures, executing the pronatal discourse, but also initially un-looked for, conditions and limitations of childfreedom. I thus use materialist (socialist) feminist authors, such as Federici (2012), Mitchell (1984), Rich (1977) and Fraser (2009) to address class privilege, connected to childfreedom, and the socioeconomic view of mothers as *producers* of people. I include this crucial aspect in attempt to contextualise childfreedom as an act that is not confined to experiences of, and influences to my informants, but has a broader meaning to the systematic (de)construction of the norm, and thus women’s position.

The above described concerns of materialist feminists are also my basis for using such terms as system and reproduction. While feminist theorists generally approach a notion of system as a global patriarchy, materialist feminists go beyond gender/sex domination and address all-encompassing ideology of capitalism (Mitchell 1984; Rich 1977; Federici 2012). I agree with this view, and expand it with insides of intersectionality (Lykke 2011). Thus, my understanding of the system is somewhat Foucauldian - multidimensional, yet based on concrete oppressions (the focal still being patriarchy), flourishing in modern capitalism.

**Methodology**

For the empirical research I interviewed eight females aged 24 to 38. They all identified as women, except Iva, who identified as gender nonconforming

4. Five women claimed to only have had relationships with men and identified as heterosexual, two claimed to be bisexual (Iva, Anna), and one – a lesbian (Viktoria). At the time of interviews most informants were married or in a long term relationships (Angela, Anna, Maria, Hana, Rita), two informants had until recently been in a long term relationships but were currently single (Viktoria, Lucy); and one informant – Iva has never been in a long term relationship. All the women had bachelor's or higher degrees in education and were currently living in big cities.

For the interviews I used a qualitative in depth semi structured interview technique. All informants were asked the same set of questions, supplementing it with extra questions rising from a conversation. Interview time varied from 36 minutes to an hour, and all interviews were made face to face except one, which was done online via Skype.

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4 With informant’s consent I will be using *she* and *woman* to refer to Iva.
In search for the informants announcements were placed in Facebook groups. For my knowledge there are no communities uniting on a basis of childfreedom in Lithuania\textsuperscript{5}. I have therefore chosen to search for my informants according to a more general interest - groups, uniting on basis of womanhood and feminism. The ads were placed in facebook groups “Feminizmas” (Feminism, my translation), “Moteru pokalbiai” (Women’s talks, my translation) and “Moteru pokalbiai prie kavos” (Women’s conversations with coffee, my translation). Most informants responded from the group Feminizmas, there was one from a group “Moteru pokalbiai prie kavos” and two informants were found using snowball technique - interviewed women recommended their acquaintances, whom I also interviewed. The informants, who recommended their acquaintances, were asked and agreed to not share the experience (including the questions asked) with the women they recommended, in order to assure genuine reactions and responses to my questions.

After receiving comments or private messages with agreement to participate, each informant was contacted individually. Requirements for informants were once again sent individually, making sure they understood and fit the criteria, a short description of my work was presented and meetings agreed. Before starting every interview, the informants’ consent for recording the session and for my use of the material for purposes of my thesis, was recorded. All interviews were conducted in Lithuanian language, transcribed and translated to English by me. While translating I attempted to keep the meaning and style of the informants’ answers as close to the original as possible. The names of the informant’s, used in the text, are changed.

The main criteria for the informants were: a biologically female\textsuperscript{6}, not less than 24 years old, currently living or have lived most of their life in Lithuania, have had considered and have taken a conscious decision to remain childfree, which is not connected to medical or relationship conditions.

\textsuperscript{5} I have searched on internet - google and facebook by search words (in Lithuanian) “voluntary childfree”, “childfree”, “don’t want to have children”, “no to children” and several other variations of similar searches. However I shall note that there might be groups, uniting under different names, not including my chosen search words. There might also be secret groups, or groups not using internet platforms.

\textsuperscript{6} A woman who has a potential ability to conceive; and is perceived by the surrounding as a cis woman. Thus, my criteria include gender queer or gender nonconforming individuals of female sex, who pass in everyday life as women.
Most studies done on a topic of voluntary childfreedom and the only study of this sort done in Lithuania, approach only heterosexual women or couples of an age that is above average age of first birth; in long term stable relationships (Toulemon 1996: 9; Tanturri & Mencarini 2008: 59; Leonavičiūtė 2012). Other works even argue that an accurate assessment of a person’s childfreedom can only be made after the reproductive age has passed, or not even then, as a person might not know about their medical problems, connected to their reproductive health and/or can still decide to adopt children (McAllister & Clarke 2000). Even though these criteria are defended by sociological methodology and the correct scientific apparatus, moreover often aims to suggest results that are representative for a broader group of society; I find it limiting and too narrow for my thesis, as well as intersectional approach as a whole. In my study the criteria for choosing informants is quite different, I will therefore shortly present them.

I am analysing women’s perception of pronatalism, their reactions to it, and childfreedom as a possible form of resistance. Furthermore, I am not attempting to show demographically accurate tendencies, but rather analyse a phenomenon as an embodied intervention into a dominating discourse. The methods and theories I use are therefore taken from Gender Studies, rather than classical sociology. For the purpose that I mention, I choose a group of informants that isn’t homogenous, but rather connected by a thematic criterion. My research is inherently aimed at a non-normativity, which I don’t see as negative. Thus choosing only monogamous heterosexual couples in a long term relationship would at the least ignore a big part of non-normative informants, for whom childfreedom plays a big role in life and identities; and for the most, choosing a hegemonic sexual orientation and relationship construct as criteria in search for non-normative informants, would be illogical.

Moreover, regarding gender identity and sexual orientation of my informants, my qualifying criterion was that gender identity and/or sexual orientation should not be reason for their childfreedom. This clearly expressed (and in some cases specified and discussed with informants) aspect was used to dismiss informants, to whom pronatalism isn’t relevant or they experience it through a very different prism and would fall out of my analysis by bringing completely different issues into my work. I also believe it is vital to include people from different groups, as sexual orientation and gender identity are no longer determining arguments
in a discussion about procreation. While Lithuania is still ruled by rather homophobic public discourse, there is an increasing public discussion about the wholesomeness (including a question of parenthood) and quality of life of all members of society; leading to increased openness and acceptance of people of non-normative sexual orientations, gender identities and relationships.

Finally, I chose relatively young informants - from 24 years old, which looking from classic sociological standpoint (McAllister & Clarke 2000; Leonavičiūtė 2012), might be considered as not old enough to have safely made such a decision. I argue (I will address this outlook later in my work) that such view is a part of a patriarchal discourse, working to dismiss the decisions of young women as immature and not self-accountable. Furthermore, I am interested in a process of inner as well as outer dialogue of my informants, and thus a recent commitment to childfreedom is a fruitful area of research.

The socioeconomic position of my informants has to be separately addressed, as it had major influence for the outcome of my work. Since one of the main criteria was an informed decision, it automatically led to informants who had considered their fertility and consequences of remaining childfree. Given that there is a big amount of women in Lithuania, who don’t have a possibility to take such a decision, due to dependence on their partner, social control, lack of economic and/or social capital, my chosen criteria automatically approached women who are in a privileged position on one or several of the mentioned points. It is also worth noting, that a less privileged group might experience pronatalism in a very different way, or even experience pressure to not have children. Communities, seen as deviant by Lithuanian public, such as of certain ethnic background, differently abled, and others, might undergo anti-natalist pressure and/or stigmatization for having children.

One could argue that an ability to voluntarily question the hegemonic discourse already predicates a privilege and a level of information, and thus a certain level of (not necessarily formal) education. Research supports such a thought - sociologists claim that higher education, income and career positions have strong correlation with childfreedom (Maslauskaitė 2005: 19-20; McAllister & Clarke 2000; Gillespie 2000). Moreover, methods of finding informants - internet forums, also limit respondents to those, using internet. Even though internet is widely
available and used in Lithuania, thematic interests of a user, as well as time available to spend on recreational forum reading and/or discussions, have to be considered.

All of the mentioned features lead to, on one hand, a group of informants, that represent different relationship statuses, sexual orientations, and other identity features; and on the other - similar socioeconomic position. High education levels as well as social capital define a group of informants, sharing a class-related privilege. Identifying this feature as a starting point is important, as it frames my research. Thus on one hand, I would like to come back to the aims of my work and argue that while I incorporate addressing the mentioned intersectional aspects into the design of my work, for a conceptual intervention that I am attempting, the insights of this group are useful. And on the other hand, as the above mentioned features were considered and became furthermore clear while analysing the interviews, it steered my work towards accounting for the privileges of my informants and the limitations of my work. I address this throughout my work, especially in the last, discussion part.

**Future motherhood and the move away**

In the previous chapter I presented the background for my thesis, previous contributions done on topics in my research area, and my own position in relation to my work. I have also presented my theoretical and methodological approaches, and having done that, I will proceed to the first empirical part. In this chapter I will discuss pronatalist hegemony by analysing testimonies of my informants, and explore their turn away from the norm, and towards childfreedom. Moreover, in the second half of this chapter, after demonstrating the pressure my informants receive, I show how this pressure shifts and roughens, once childfreedom is openly communicated. I will explore the attempts to challenge the norm, see what hardships such endeavour brings, and show that pronatalist mores aren’t easily challenged.

The patriarchal society traditionally constructs women as wives, homemakers, mothers and fosterers of culture and certain values (Beauvoir 2011; Irigaray 1985; Rich 1977; etc.). Western tradition sees a woman as an endlessly complexed ambiguous character ultimately rooted in lack (Irigaray 1985; 1993). Different strands of feminism see the root causes of the prescribed lack as stemming from different locations, one of the most discussed parentage of modern systematic
patriarchy, agreed upon by many gender theorists, is classical psychoanalysis (Irigaray 1985; Chesler 1972; Mitchell 1975). The authors, referenced above, develop feminist perspective to psychoanalysis and supply a deep analysis for the workings of sexism in our society. I use Irigaray’s readings (1985; 1993) of classical philosophy, including psychoanalysis as she offers an account for motherhood as constructed on the psychoanalytical lack of a woman. Motherhood, according to the author’s analysis, is offered as a multidimensional substitute for what a woman supposedly lacks (Irigaray 1985). A baby thus becomes her outsourced subjectivity, desire and relation with herself and her sexuality (ibid.).

Irigaray connects the fulfilment of the mentioned lack with different aspects of womanhood and the economy we are expected to perform in (ibid.). Connected aspects of traditional femininity are different faces of one image of what a good woman should be: gentle, caring, maternal, altruistic, natural etc. Deviation from each of the roles can be excused by emphasizing other role: a woman, concentrating on her career will often be seen as determined and strong, able to fend for herself and her children, furthermore it will be emphasized that these are traits of a strong modern woman, and those are liked by strong modern men. An outspoken woman, supporting non-traditional views, will be seen as interesting and open-minded, just as long as she doesn’t act too radical or give too much of herself to the cause - no one wants a family with a militant. I myself have gotten excuses for my alternative lifestyle: “she travels a lot and continues her studies… well, why not, she already has a husband.” Each of these examples of non traditional femininity is good enough in a spectrum of a good woman, as each can be excused by a perceived attempt or at least potential for the ultimate expression of femininity - motherhood.

The different intertwining roles leave just enough room for a semblance of choice as combinations of these roles construct identities and diversity. It is difficult to examine each of them separately as they overflow and interchange, however the central one remains motherhood. In the semblance of choice pronatal discourse is often latent, invisible, yet omnipresent. Being that, it expresses itself and/or is enacted in different ways and through different agents.

As pronatal discourse is an integral part of the society, most of it we, the general population, don’t notice, just like we don’t notice and take for granted other structures that govern our lives, such as the nation state, our relation with non-human species, or the naturalised social rules we
live by. Given this taken-for-granted feature of pronatalism, the first questions I explore in the interviews are devoted to exposing its invisibility, bringing it to the daylight and denaturalising it. Only having grasped the extensions of indoctrination in the concrete experiences, I can move on towards analysing the effects and the reactions to it.

Through asking my informants about their first thoughts on motherhood, I gained an unmediated glance into the mechanisms, pronatalist discourse was expressed through. Situations, where the subject of motherhood was introduced as a natural course of future, were mentioned by most informants as a first trigger to start considering the question. Women mostly describe conversations with females in their families. One of the informants, Lucy colourfully describes early teenage years’ conversation with her mother. She was introduced to expectations regarding her future as a woman: “when a mother sits a daughter down and tells her about how life works, what is relationship, what is children, how to create a family, how to find a husband” she uses third person, suggesting universality of such a conversation.

‘When you find a husband’ [laughs] it starts from this. <...> starts from what a woman has to be to be liked by a man – ‘be nice, be helpful, he’ll love you, you will have to raise a kid. You will have to devote some of your career, a child will have to be your priority. One child won’t be enough for you, coz how will a child be growing without another, you’ll have to have a second. About the third – you can choose; and the forth – according to your possibilities’ (Lucy)

Lucy identifies this moment as the one where she realised the duty she has to fulfil - “then comes the realisation that one has to have something – a husband, children” (my emphasis).

The conversation Lucy had with her mother, later referred by her as “a sweet memory” is in essence an instruction in womanhood. The mother had likely received a similar instruction from her mother as a naturalised unquestioned recipe for a successful life. The informant is certain about her mother’s best intentions and I have no reasons to doubt her - the heteronormative pronatalist life line is established as a universal path to feminine happiness.

Federici (2012), together with other feminists, such as Rich (1977) and Butler (2006) point to the long process of naturalisation of femininity, showing how much work is being put in the seemingly genuine result - being a good woman: “it takes at least 20 years of socialisation - day-to-day training, performed by an unwaged mother - to prepare a woman for this role, to convince her that children and husband are the best she can expect from life” (Federici 2012: 17). The
lesson my informants received, fits Federici’s description. Advice is not only chronological, starting from ways to be liked by a man and ending in having several children, the different steps are presented as each resulting from the previous one, with each following step being a reward for the last. The mother starts using imperative - *be nice, you’ll have to*. A choice element, as the conversation is remembered by the informant, comes in the very end - around the third child. So the free will to choose is upheld, but is only available as a result of fulfilled basic expectations.

Other informants mention school experiences as triggering first thoughts on the topic: “me and my friend got a topic in school, something about taking care of babies, and I remember being 16 thinking ‘maybe it would be nice to have this baby’” (Iva). “When I was around 14-15, the teenage years, the talks started among my classmates, friends ‘oh a baby, look, I also want one...’” (Maria). Teenage years are mentioned by several women as the time where they got introduced and started entertaining the idea of motherhood. Procreation is seen as something one is grown into, a future fact and the source of the notion is not even always clear – “the talk started”.

The naturalised idea is expressed as rootless and thus omnipresent. One of the women clearly reflects the nature of normativity, how one is born and raised into it:

> I think there always is a thing in people's minds up to some age, where people can’t imagine it differently. I think so. A person lives, thinks ‘I’ll finish school, go to the university, get married, have kids, have a job’ those are the things that are somehow programmed and I also used to think the same (Rita).

Sara Ahmed explains this normative world view through a metaphor of orientations. Her phenomenological take on normativity is based on a ingeniously simplistic idea that our take on the world around us is built upon what we see in front of us - “we take what is given as simply a matter of what happens to be ‘in front’ of us” (Ahmed 2006: 14). Even though informants have rejected motherhood as a life path, the normative scheme remains unchallenged. Normativity is seen as inevitable part of life, which they happened to have challenged in relation to their own lives. The source of the idea of inevitable motherhood isn’t touched but most women expressed past realisation of their future prospect as a starting point of questioning.

A bigger part of the group of informants start describing their thoughts from the first moment of discontent with the idea of them as reproductive agents: “this understanding that I don’t want to,
came when I was around 14-15, when my friends started thinking about wedding, marriage, a stereotypical thing, we used to talk in school about what each of us would want. One of my friends used to say that she wants four kids; and I always thought – no” (Hana). The described situation marks the contradiction between concrete normative wishes and her rejection of it, expressed by one word. Brevity and determination, articulated by a word “no” as equivalent to friends’ expressions of their wishes illustrate unequal options: one - hegemonic, and thus easily articulated and repeated; and another - clear rejection of the norm but not developed further than that.

Another informant, Iva, describes a period from first thoughts to decision making as a process of maturing and acquiring knowledge “I continued to think about it as I matured and I remember when I was 18 -19, I started thinking more seriously what a baby is <...> and the more information I got the less I wanted to have a baby”. Again, the informant counter positions motherhood, as a norm and starting point, with her decision, which is viewed as gradual estrangement, a drift, caused by a deepening understanding. The notion of motherhood is experienced as clear and static, while childfreedom epitomizes dynamic and diverse, yet undeveloped feeling, evolving in different ways through different women.

Another informant, Angela expresses her dissociation without comparing “when I was a teenager I thought that this family model and this relationship aren’t very interesting for me. I mean the heteronormative with a wife, husband and children; work – family, work – family. I thought this thing isn’t for me”. Angela doesn’t refer to a process, but describes a resulting thought, however, as most women, still explicitly describing the norm, in this case - as a reason for her decision, but not the alternative. Coming out of the previously described process of naturalisation and its result, an accepted seemingly eternal norm, the women describe their effort to root and rationalise their discontent. While the hegemony is in no need for argumentation, any alternative path requires a conscious effort, or in Ahmed’s terms - a turn away as a first step (Ahmed 2006).

**Pronatal pressure**

Above I begin to display the hegemony of pronatalism, and I will continue in this part to show the pressure as an expression of a normative-pronatalist setting. The first sensations, of what normative life model offers to the women, are not concrete, often felt by the women in their
teenage years. At this stage the norm presents a future position, possibly felt as a must, but not yet understood as such. Further elaborations, when the women talk about the pressure they felt at older ages, when motherhood became a social expectation, uncover the rigidity of pronatalism. The previously fragmented encounters with normative pronatal discourse turn into relatively ubiquitous pressure.

Informants talked at length about various expressions of the pressure, felt from different groups of people.

Most often there are two categories <...> with older ones it’s completely impossible to touch this topic, they get offended, angry and the whole thing ends up badly, so <...> I just tell that I want my decisions to be respected and it’s my personal matter. With women of my age or younger we talk, we discuss the topic. (Anna)

The informant separates women, questioning her childfreedom, according to the perceived strength of their conviction. The older generation have already experienced motherhood, they are mothers. Given the cultural as well as material circumstances in their youth (limited availability of contraception, state pronatalism, etc.), they are likely to have had even less freedom to choose than their younger counterparts. Them taking offence and interpreting childfreedom as disrespect is thus on one hand, rather understandable, on the other, difficult to challenge. It can be seen as younger women discarding a value, which has been a big part of life for the older generation. The young ones are seen by the informant as products of their environment, whose questions rise from honest surprise and a genuine lack of understanding. Here a childfree woman can offer a different perspective and an alternative to the normative indoctrination.

Another informant, Maria, makes similar categorisations: “well I noticed already since school that all the pretty girls, well the ones about sparkly things, nails ‘oh Jesus, it’s a baby, how pretty...’[says in a ironic high pitch voice] so from these ones [used to get the comments], then from the teachers’ age ones”. Again, two age groups of women are distinguished - her own generation and the older one, assumingly already mothers. Furthermore, informant colourfully expresses difference in enactment of gender - the described pretty girls are the well gendered, performing femininity to a level, which appears unacceptable and irony-worth for the informant.

I here agree with Annily Campbell - since motherhood is a feminine must, being well gendered, as my informant notices, has a direct connection with motherhood (1999). Thus in relation to
pressure the two groups aren’t only distinguishable by age (younger and older), but by their relation to normative femininity. One group - the generation, which has already fulfilled its reproductive duty, thus conformed to the rule my informants are breaking; and another - my informants’ age, seen in a closer, critical light, though still having a potential to do either of the options - conform or rebel.

Relationships with male partners and family members can present a latent, and thus complicated pressure. A decision of childfreedom, taken by a woman individually, inevitably creates tensions in a heterosexual relationship.

The partners react strangely. They tend to think that they can talk me over and if it gets necessary, they’ll change my mind <...> they say ‘ok, at the moment work is important to you’, they don’t accept it, they think it can change. And they want it to change. [How does that make you feel?] Discussions rise, quarrels (civilised quarrels), sometimes anger rises just because another person doesn’t accept one's opinion and doesn’t believe what you really think <...> do I look so untrustworthy that I couldn’t defend my words?(Lucy).

Disbelief in Lucy’s decision naturally causes her frustration. She rightfully interprets it as distrust and disrespect - the partner, likely unwittingly, reacts in a brutal patriarchal way - disregards her decision, thus denying her full subjectivity.

Another informant tells a similar story: “we used to talk and conversations were half serious ‘eh, it'll change, you’ll see’” (Maria). Yet another woman, Hana, claims pronatalist pressure to have been a part of all her previous relationships.

All my previous boyfriends had a hope that I can be persuaded. My current partner isn’t an exception, the difference is that we talked about it many times and he knows that if he decides to connect his future with mine, he has to consider that it might happen that I will never change my mind.

The current relationship, as she describes it, seems to be an improvement, unfortunately if we look into it, the difference appears to be meager. A consensus is reached after a process of multiple conversations, and the result isn’t full acceptance of her choice, but merely an acknowledgment of it as an unwanted possibility.

As pronatalism in a relationship isn’t so clearly antagonistic, all of the women who experienced

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7 Different, though equally important situations can arise in non heterosexual and/or non monogamous relationships, however the dynamic in lesbian relationship is different due to two women having capability to give birth. Out of other informants, including the ones, identifying as bisexual, the question of male partners’ views didn’t rise.
it described it as a matter of thoughtful discussions, rather than pressure. Essentially, however, brutal it may sound, what is reached is reconciliation with a possible option of a future failure to execute his wishes over her body. As I elaborate in the following subchapter, such rejection of women’s choice is a typical patriarchal mechanism of control.

Securing an independent childfree future, free of tensions connected to the question of children, is a priority for some women in choosing their potential partners. Angela simply claims “they wouldn’t be my partners if I saw that there are completely other desires and completely different understandings”, while Maria presents a provocative dating strategy to avoid the potential partner pressure, described above.

I used to go on dates and one of my first questions used to be ‘do you want to have children?’ He would go ‘oh you’re really quick with this question’ – ‘well yes, it is relevant to me’ – ‘well yes, I do’. I would ask why ‘well it’s necessary to keep the bloodline’ this used to be the main answer. I’d ask ‘is that the main reason you want children for?’ The answer used to be ‘well yes, how else – I am here, my parents are here, everybody gave birth, made children’ (Maria).

While the situation seems rather comic, it first of all illustrates the prevalence of a norm of motherhood and a naturalised pronatalist attitude. Apart from a fair chance that the men in these conversations were conforming to what they thought their date wanted to hear (what women normatively ought to want), their responses are telling. Confronted with a crucial question about their future, they give clear answers, basing them on nothing else, but the continuity of the bloodline.

The mentioned argument can be divided in two main ones: their family’s, their father’s continuation; and the reiteration of an act based on the act being perpetually reiterated. Examining the arguments critically, it becomes clear that one is an ancient patriarchal attempt by men to ensure their own pure reproduction; and another - an expression of naturalization of the pronatalist discourse. In Butlerian thinking (2006), a notion or action being perpetuated until it becomes axiomatic and unquestionable, even more - immune to questioning and appropriating the deviances.

Similar experiences are shared by childfree women regarding their other immediate family: “my parents, well, now they react well. Many years have passed and we talked a lot with them. We explained a lot logically our decision. My father still says sometimes ‘maybe you’ll change your
mind’ well – ya, maybe [says conformingly], what else can one say” (Rita). Again the decision is contested and a result of meager acknowledgment of a possibility of women’s decision actualizing is reached. A long emotional process of argumentation is indicated, but, as I suggest earlier in the text, rational arguments have little effect against naturalized norm, immune to questioning.

The current relationship of my informant and her father is thus based on both sides tolerating each other's positions, one - retaining the hope of a change; and another - conformingly not objecting. While the situation could be far worse (my relationship with my parents is much more complicated after more than 10 years of discussions on the matter), is still far from satisfying - the seemingly acceptable consensus, the middle ground is still deep in an area of a woman’s body and her freedom to govern it. The compromise is not full independence, it’s one party (out of countless pronatal agents in woman’s life) agreeing to her autonomy, while still attempting to peacefully impose its laws.

Parents, partners and people in hierarchical positions are somewhat obvious sources for pronatalist influence as they all have some kind of understandable interests in women’s lives. Friends and strangers, on the other hand, could seem as hierarchically equal and/or indifferent to a decision against procreation. However, experiences of my informants show otherwise. When motherhood is in question, views seem to be based more on reproductive experience, than aspects normally associated with friendship, such as mutual acceptance, shared experiences and interests.

One of the informants expresses her disappointment in her friend circle:

I have friends in my circles, many of my friends started to give births massively [laughs] <...> And they used to ask me, for fun at first ‘well it’s your turn now, we all went through it’ I would say ‘well you can go a second round if you really want to’ – ‘no, but how so, you also have to...’ it is all in a form of jokes, but there is a feeling that under the jokes there is a lack of understanding of why I am acting in such way. They don’t see my choice as natural ‘but you are healthy, you earn enough, is it hard for you?’ I say ‘it’s not hard for me, I don’t want to’ (Anna).

One could argue that pressure from friends is based on a desire to share the experiences of parenthood, to get further connected through similar joys and hardships from childbirth and baby care, to parent-bonding through play dates and similar. And I am sure that to some extent this is
true. Still, the arguments used by the mentioned friends illustrate other than their wish for strengthening of interpersonal bonds. They speak in a name of normativity. Having pointed out the conditions (lack of which is socially regarded as an acceptable excuse to postpone or cede procreation), seen as optimal for parenthood: socially acceptable age, economic status and health, the friends yield to ignorance. The final question is it hard for you illustrates how the norm isn’t even remotely questioned. After all the acceptable reasons for childlessness are considered, the option of choice isn’t entertained, moving directly to a desperate assumption of immature fear of hardships, as expressed by the last phrase.

Maria shares a similar episode.

There was an incident on Facebook, I had posted a picture with my cousin’s daughter <...> all my friends saw it and commented ‘here, you see, it’s also time for you to have one, when is your turn? ’ all the aunts and uncles started commenting and I just hit back like ‘what is this time, do you decide when it’s my time to have children? If so, then it’s time for you to retire, you’re 50, go to pension or old people’s home’. What is this pressure!? Everybody went like wow, called my parents, asked ‘what’s up with this daughter of yours?’

The response of my informant is logically adequate - she answers to the people pressuring her into making a major step in her life, by inverting the pressure. A reaction to which is outrage, revealing how little logics or rationality has to do with the pressure. Even an appeal to her parents is made - an ultimate patriarchal form of conducting control over a woman.

Maria mentions the arguments, used to persuade her: “‘it’s your obligation it’s a woman’s obligation’. Oh Jesus, it’s the 21st century, how can it be an obligation, I say - who am I?! Especially when they say ‘a woman has to be a firekeeper’ – come on [says in English] the times have changed” Maria. Similarly, to another informant, Hana, who previously compares openly pronatalist views with living under a rock, Maria attempts to counteract the discourse of a woman’s place by suggesting a clear separation between then and now, implying that pronatalist attitudes are an historical remnant. The contradiction is furthermore emphasized by her using words women’s obligation and an English expression, marking impatience - come on.

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8 Having conceptualised childfreedom as explicitly voluntary, I use childlessness as the phenomenon viewed from a perspective of the norm.
9 Direct translation from Lithuanian ‘židinio kūrentoja’ - expression, used to describe woman’s place as creator and protector of home as a safe and rejuvenating haven for the rest of the family.
Yet another informant describes pronatalist pressure as directly connected with provincialism.

This society's pressure really exists and I don’t know how to escape it. And especially men and especially in smaller towns <...> I’m from a province and there is a tremendous pressure from men towards women on how to behave, how to dress, that women cannot reach anything bigger and that men have to always be above. I can’t understand it, it irritates me, hurts me and makes me angry and I don’t know how it can go on this way, but it is (Hana).

She describes most direct patriarchal pressure over women. The emphasis is on province, which is usually connected to lower education and income rate as well as traditionalism. Hana continues: “we don’t live in some bubbles or under a rock to not know what is happening around. We read, listen, hear and so on. So out of what comes from the media, the stories, other people's experiences”. The informant employs temporal axis and suggests that we (the educated, modern) read, listen, hear as opposed to they - living under a rock. Clearly my informant belongs to a privileged position as compared to the women she is talking about. Having herself succeeded to escape her backwards background she describes, she succumbs to a liberal feminist ideal of a self-empowered femininity, thus dissociating from the women who, according to her, are affected by the pressure. However, Hana comes back to generalizing based on gender - “in my experience men are the ones, who seem to look with tolerance, but actually they are the first ones to ask the questions ‘why don’t you want [children], how is it so that you don’t want, what do you think for yourself, why…?’(Hana).

Pressure from men, especially in a described lower class context, is the rawest form of pronatalism, deriving directly from patriarchal control over women’s lives. This raw expression, often written off as a dying fault of the uneducated, the poor and the marginalised, and thus not taken into an account in a big context of what is seen as a modern Lithuania, is the most explicit expression of patriarchal pronatalism. Furthermore, as materialist feminists show, the feminine burden of reproductive labour falls most heavily on the working class women (Federici 2012; Rowbotham 1973). Often deprived of economic and social capital to achieve de facto choice, their experiences of patriarchy are tightly intersected with their class position.

Anna makes the separation between us and them even clearer.

It makes me angry, but not personally because they pressure me, I react calmly to this, but I am angry that women still frame themselves into these rigid frames and imagine that if you are born a woman, then that’s it, your life is well determined <...> So I am mostly angry that we still have
this patriarchal society and a woman still has only one place, that being in a family and with children. I am angry that men can calmly go towards their aims while women have this ballast of raising kids and it doesn’t matter if you want it or don’t, these are the norms of the society and you have to have them [kids].

Anna identifies the oppression - patriarchal norms, and expresses anger towards biological determinism, though her feminist rampage starts from a telling distinction between personal anger and that, based on her political attitudes. Her further thoughts about women’s oppression depict a valid critique to women’s position in society. However her first disclaimer, separating herself from the subjects of the oppression, reveals a perceived distance between herself and the women affected by pronatalism. The separation is further deepened as she uses words women themselves to describe the act of subjugation.

While dissociating from the pronatalist pressure, the women see it as unacceptable. Maria claims:

“when the politicians speak, most often men for some reason, that ‘oh no, a woman has to give birth, no matter what age, no matter how the pregnancy happened, she’ll raise it anyway’. Well I’d feel like a Slave Izaura\textsuperscript{10}, a tragedy happened and to be a good woman I am obliged to give birth?! It’s disgusting and scary when public personas say these things, coz they should spread tolerance and freedom of choice. We are a democracy after all. [it is] the public sector that pushes us [to have children]” (Maria).

She emotionally tells her view towards the pressure from public figures, comparing a position to which they impel a woman, to slavery. Appealing by an argument of democracy, which should be propagated by the ruling class, she makes a point of institutionalised coercive pronatalism, executed not through current laws, but rather public propagation of woman’s function.

The expressed claim of dissociation can finally be clearly separated into how informants sees the pressure from a personal and from political perspectives - while they reject most influences on themselves, a broader political impact infuriates most of them. The pressure, which is seen as enslavement of women, doesn’t apply to my informants - their right to their bodies and selves is established and articulated through childfreedom. The informants make a distinction between themselves and those, whom the pronatalism affect, signalling an established self, no longer vulnerable in a face of pressure, as well as dissociating themselves from their described underprivileged environments and social relations.

\textsuperscript{10} Reference to a Mexican soap opera, which has been very popular on Lithuanian TV in the 90’s.
Some informants directly say that pronatalism doesn’t affect them personally: “honestly I don’t really care what they say. I only think that it [the way of thinking] is probably from the soviet or even older times, the masses. I have never really been a part of these masses, so it hasn’t been relevant to me” (Maria). The informant disassociates herself from the pronatalist way of thinking and the masses. Another informant claims: “I simply don’t think about it. I compare it with my vegetarianism <...> when I come to a grocery store I don’t look into a meat section, right, so it’s the same here – I don’t think about it, so it doesn’t raise any emotions” (Rita).

Comparison with vegetarianism is rather accurate - it’s an often politically informed personal choice, which is, just as childfreedom, often questioned and condemned by propagators of the hegemony. My own dietary choices decrease the area of a grocery store to just a couple of aisles, however, while one can avoid the meat section in a store, being a vegetarian, especially in Lithuania (where such a choice is not very popular), one is constantly faced with meat - it’s a part of most dishes and integral to the very culture. The not thinking about it, I suggest, is just as a conscious choice as not doing it. A way of orienting oneself away from hostile aspects of environment in order to protect oneself from a constant repetitive antagonism (Ahmed 2006).

As Ahmed suggests, “[t]he objects that we direct our attention toward reveal the direction we have taken in life” (2006: 546). While the author claims that being a part of a straight line makes this normativity invisible, she also suggests that through orienting we create our own views, tendencies, which are “effects of the repetition of tending toward” (Ahmed 2006: 553, original emphasis). I suggest that this is exactly what my informants are doing, result of which is them, to different extends, dissociating from pronatalist pressure.

As I show through my informants’ experiences, pronatal pressure is a constant part of a childfree women’s life, and becomes increasingly visible, once women start drifting away from the normative line. Childfree women distinguish different attempted influences, coming from different groups of people. Categories of age, class and geographical category - province, are distinguished as defining the intensity and a role, taken in performing the pressure. The gender motive threads throughout all statements of the informants, suggesting (which some women explicitly do) that the strongest pressure is felt from men.

Furthermore, it is clear from the interviews how differently the pronatalism is enacted depending
on personal relation - the closer the pronatal agent is to the childfree woman, the more forbearing and gentle the pressure is. In romantic relations especially, pronatalism is not seen as such, but rather interpreted as a mutual negotiation of a common future. And on the other side of the spectrum is the direct patriarchal control identified by my informants as such and expressed with clear emotions of frustration and anger. Furthermore, people from different demographic and socio-economic positions enact pronatalism differently. Gender, age and class are clearest categories of influence. I suggest, agreeing with Federici, that current social structure and nuclear family as its unit, employs not only women, but all people under different roles (2012: 96). Thus, while women of reproductive age are the target of pronatalism, all other social strata have their normative functions in the up-keeping of the system, and thus executing the pronatalist pressure.

Finally, formulations, used by most informants, show their privileged position. Attempts to dissociate from the pronatalist pressure by identifying it as feature of provincialism, lack of education or archaism allow them to position themselves as opposite to all the mentioned negative features. My informants see mentioned direct pressure as radically different from that, affecting them, and would likely not agree to seeing their partners’ or dates’ behaviour as patriarchal control. I, however, argue, analysing their statements, that the gentle pressure is not in its essence better, it is merely wrapped in a milder expression, due to affectionate relation between the pronatal agents and the childfree women. As I show by using Ahmed’s (2006) phenomenological account of heterosexual normativity, the pronatal norm is unquestioned, embodied and exercised unwittingly by relatively all members of the normative line. Thus while many of the mentioned people in childfree women’s lives can be assumed to not have vicious intentions, under alleviated severity of the strain directed to childfree girlfriends, daughters and friends, is the same brutal patriarchal denial of their subjectivity and thus their full humanness.

**Decision**

In the previous subchapter I have demonstrated the omnipresence of pronatalist norm and the pressure it executes as well as childfree women’s views of it. In the following section I will inquire the process of deciding to remain childfree. The women are retrospectively aware of at least a part of the pressure, and express content with their decision. I will onwards explore how this state was reached, how a decision to abandon the pronatal norm was taken.
Talking about considerations and decision making most women referred to the situations, where they found themselves in a position of an object to the pronatal discourse. They depict situations where they were introduced to and/or pushed toward their supposedly inevitable future – motherhood. Thus, the consideration, whether the projected future is for them, is the first and crucial step to childfreedom.

A move away from the norm is at length analysed by Sarah Ahmed in her phenomenological take on non-normative orientations (2006). In the last subchapter I touch upon her analysis of non-heterosexuality as a drift away from a straight line. I suggest that it can be applied in analysing a different orientation - orientation away from motherhood. The author suggests: “risking departure from the straight and narrow, makes new futures possible, which might involve going astray, getting lost, or even becoming queer” (2006: 554). The norm of motherhood presents a powerful hegemony, executing itself through different agents in a person’s life. An alternative, as I show above, is vague and abstract, appealing not in what it is, but rather what it is not. I will thus in a following section explore the turn away from the norm, or in Ahmed’s terms out of line, toward the invisible (rather than contra-promoted) deviant alternative (2006).

Most women couldn’t recall an exact moment of decision making, some claimed that there wasn’t a concrete turning point, but they all shared memories of thinking about it, considering as a process. “It was rather natural, but with time the later the clearer it is for me that no. Before there used to be considerations, weighing, but with time the no overruled” (Iva).

I was sitting and thinking what I should ... what I should refuse so I could have children and I realised that I can’t find the thing that I would want to refuse for children. And so it naturally came to be that there are no kids and won’t be”. <...> we got older, we continued considering, but somehow eventually you let this thought go. And that’s it, we decided (Anna).

Some women made the decision individually independently of any significant romantic relationship, or even before having been in one. “It just somehow naturally came. I didn’t even think much of it, I used to accentuate that I don’t want marriage. Coz traditionally (when I was very young) I used to think that there has to be a marriage and then comes the children. And as I used to say I will certainly not get married and I don’t need kids” (Hana). Being young, Hana chronologically approached the normative life-line, rejecting the first step - marriage, and seeing
childfreedom as a positive consequence of it.

The way of thinking of the very young Hana is naive on one hand, and insightful on the other. She grasps the essence of the heterosexual contract as it is exposed by Carole Pateman, and rejects not only motherhood, but the entire patriarchal bargain (1988). Maria also claims a natural, nearly instinctual state of childfreedom. “When I was 18, I said that it was my decision, I don’t want it and I won’t [have kids] <...> this was pretty naturally with me all the time, I didn’t sit down and make a decision”.

Hana and Maria present the decision as an inseparable part of their development, a part of themselves and their individual priorities. For other women, whom I interviewed, rejection of motherhood took longer and was an outcome of a mutual decision made with their long term partners.”When I started to be in a relationship with my (then) future husband, we used to talk ‘once we have children’ we would think about the names and so on. These are somehow natural things. But later <...> one starts to think, consider – do I want it, what will it lead to; and then some decision is made” (Rita). “As you live your life, you figure that maybe this is not a thing that is important for you. <...> at one point I really wanted [children] I even started looking for a husband. When I found a man, when we had a good relationship, I realised that there is no hurry. And I liked that” (Lucy). Viktoria, one of the informants, refers to a path of a normative relationship: “when one thinks about a natural progression of a relationship, the question of children comes up. <...> as the relationship progressed, I started thinking for myself that I don’t have a wish to have a small copy of myself running around asking to take care of it. Well that’s how I imagine kids [laughs].”

Childfreedom is an informed mature decision for this group of women. Differently from the informants mentioned earlier, they see the norm as somehow natural - a starting point for their decision, a state they have been a part of. A drift away from this default setting - thinking, considering, realizing, is described as a mature process they went through up to the decision. One of the informants, Angela, described her journey to childfreedom as passing through both previously mentioned options of development - the continuous natural feeling of childfreedom, and a transformation away from the previously planned motherhood. While she was never excited about the idea of normative family or raising children, she notes: “it further crystallised
when I had my first relationship and somehow with the partner we had some sort of a half articulated agreement that no, definitely kids aren’t a priority neither now nor anytime nor even in a marriage”.

Direct pressure from the surroundings is mentioned as another stimulus for choosing childfreedom. Rita took a mutual decision with her husband. She says “we got married early and people ask questions ‘when will the children come?’ <...> we talked <...> and we somehow decided that we don’t want it”. Iva, describing her decision as a process, which took a long time, indicates a specific effect pressure from others had: “It was thinking, influence from outside, all kind of relatives ‘oh aren’t you thinking about children?’ I wouldn’t have if they didn’t ask and say ‘oh the biological clock’” - the woman expresses her dissatisfaction and clearly states that the process was forced upon her by outside pronatalist influences. Thus, not only did pronatalism execute itself through the people around her, it did it before the subject had come to consider the topic on her own terms - the pressure was premature as seen from her point of view.

However, reference to the biological clock shows the normative ideas of female life cycle. The factors of physical maturity and age were interpreted by the people enacting the pressure, as marks of a right timing for motherhood, and thus an appeal to comply to the norm was made. Inga continues “this thinking was the beginning of the process. I started thinking and no matter how I looked at it, I always came to the same conclusion – that I don’t want to have children”. She indicates multiple unsuccessful attempts to reconcile with the idea of motherhood, however, as the informant mentions earlier, knowledge about the topic leads her to rejection of it. Knowledge in this case (“the more information I got the less I wanted to have a baby”) is rational knowledge, as opposed to normative influences, expressed automatically, uncritically by the people in her environment. Similar evolution of thought is described by most informants - estrangement from the norm is driven by their active consideration, often described as rational, articulated, argumentative. The division presents hierarchy between axiomatic norm, and an amorphous alternative in need of defence. Hence an understandable attempt to rationalise and argument for a choice, that is seen as deviant; while the leading pronatal discourse thrives without a need for rationalisation or justification.

Even though several times referred to as pretty natural, the decision making process wasn’t easy
for most women. Anna tells: “you [means herself] say that you don’t plan, but at the same time inside you feel insecure, you don’t know how it’s going to end up. And now I can safely say that no, I won’t have children and that doesn’t cause me any emotions or psychological traumas. So, well, this peace of mind came”. The insecurity could be connected to a fear of accidental pregnancy, but as the informant later claims, the insecurity vanished having taken the decision to stay childfree. A more plausible base for her feelings could thus be located in the pressure applied to the childfree woman. A period of consideration puts a woman in a position between her wishes, thoughts and plans; and the society telling her that not only is her decision wrong, it merely is a decision, much less hers.

Iva’s experience goes even further: “I used to have doubts – what if I change my mind, maybe I am young and stupid, I don’t understand... but I read other people's <...> opinions and they helped me, not to decide, but to realise that my decision isn’t stupid. Because in the beginning I thought so, coz I was told so ‘you are stupid yet, you don’t know anything’” [original emphasis]. Insecurity, expressed by Iva, is not caused merely by the pronatalist pressure, but by a transformed pressure, which I explore in the following subchapters - after the decision of childfreedom is articulated.

The women took different paths to childfreedom. For some, the process of decision making was intuitive, described as natural and taken even before they became involved in relationships, while others described the norm by the word natural. Most informants depicted the decision making as an active process of establishing and confirming their standpoint. Even in cases where it was described as natural, active inner dialogues were had. Either way, deserting the norm marks stepping out of what Ahmed calls a normative line, and entering deviance, thus, the unease and the need to rationally argue for their choice is understandable (2006).

While Ahmed’s (ibid.) metaphor of lines refers to sexual orientations, childfreedom in itself is not a sexuality. It represents a partial failure of the normative orientation, to be exact – a temporal continuation of the straight line – a progeny. In this sense Ahmed’s spatial analysis (ibid.) is similar to Edelman’s temporal (2004), referring to the future. Even though Ahmed disagrees with Edelman on the queer (no) future (Ahmed 2006: 570), both authors establish their subjects as deviances, gone astray from the normative line. My subjects can be compared to both,
as by deciding to remain childfree, regardless of their sexual orientation, they deviate from the norm. My informants don’t necessarily leave straight as sexual orientation: some of them aren’t a part of it to begin with, and others lead normative heterosexual lifestyles; yet they cut off the line by discontinuing it. And so, regardless of them not necessarily being queer in a sexual orientation sense, arriving at the decision of childfreedom doesn’t only lead them astray the pronatalist norm, but a broader invisible straight line.

**Articulation - difference between not having and not wanting children**

The decision to not have children is significant, yet only its articulation publically declares the deviance and emphasizes voluntarism of non-reproduction. Above I explore the evolution from the invisible grip of the norm to the crucial point of its rejection. In this following section I will examine next important turn – making one's childfreedom public. I will explore the difference between not having children and *voluntary* not having children, inquiring how it challenges the norm and frames childfreedom. I will suggest that the declaration of intention has immense importance. It publically positions the women outside the pronatalist norm and thus disrupts the invisibility of both parties – the norm and the deviants.

Hana describes a situation between taking the decision and its declaration through an example of her acquaintances.

> It’s like they have told to themselves that they don’t want to have children, but the environment or personal relations affect them in a way that they don’t declare it and publically [they] say ‘ya ya, maybe one day’ and their example for me is... well, not the most painful, but clearest and affecting me strongest. As if a person is compelled, of course because of fear, maybe because of some reservation, but she is compelled to hide her true feelings and can’t tell it to anyone, coz the closest environment won’t understand.

The mentioned acquaintance is limiting her childfreedom to inner decision (or shared with her partner), not stepping over the limit of open declaration. Outspoken articulation of childfreedom destroys an assumption of future motherhood and thus, the mentioned woman is protecting herself (and possibly her relationship) by allowing the illusion. The closeted childfreedom allows avoiding the often brutal confrontations. One stays inside the norm allowing to be seen as a failure, however not an enemy. More than anything else, however, the mediated position exemplifies the pressure of the norm and the anticipated hardships of open declaration.
Another informant contra-positions her choice to declare her childfreedom, with those who don’t: “I know cases where women don’t want to say this because there is a very big society’s pressure so they make up all kinds of things like that they are barren and so on” (Anna). Challenging the normative assumption that every woman is a future mother isn’t necessarily easy as is clear through the examples above.

Differently than the acquaintances, mentioned by the women I interviewed, all informants claimed that they openly talk about their decision. Most noted that it’s not something they announce, but they never hold back if it comes up in conversations. “I have never been a very private person, I don’t pretend <...> I just say that it’s my choice <...> I am not looking for some easy understandable reasons for people to get off my back, I just tell that it’s my decision and that’s it” (Anna). Anna’s stance is similar to most others - she doesn’t actively announce or advocate her choice, but unapologetically stands by it if the occasion rises.

Iva illustrates a different approach: “I like to say it out loud and wait for a reaction <...> and my main response is you mind your own life and I’ll mind mine, you can’t dictate me”. While loud statement might contradict her minding one’s own argument, such provocation can be a pretext for discussion or advocacy. In Foucauldian view, when oppression surfaces, becomes clear, it creates potential for resistance (Picket 1996: 452). Thus, a disruption of the invisibility might be a needed first step towards deconstruction of the status quo.

Whilst weighing one's options in a form of (mostly) internal dialogue, a woman is seen under the same normative frame. The consideration doesn’t openly challenge the norm. Since motherhood is seen as an inherent part of being a woman, every one of us is a future mother unless we claim otherwise. As Edelman suggests, justification for any sexual relations and social order as a whole, is based on a “heterosexual alibi” - an always present assumption of a future child (2004: 13). The social order, built on an idea of future procreation, assumes all women to be future mothers.

The decision to not follow this order is significant, however, not necessarily visible and thus, not necessarily contesting the status quo. Proclamation of childfreedom by openly talking about ones decision in the social circles, on the other hand, challenges the norm thus creating a direct antagonism. “Perhaps not so much not having children, but saying ‘I don’t want them’, coz ‘oh
god, how can a woman not want it’ because it’s like all women have to have a family and have to want it” (Hana). Explicitly and openly articulating childfreedom as a voluntary act of not-having-children, a woman rejects the mentioned status quo, and takes (or, as I will argue later in the text, attempts to take) herself out of the condition of future motherhood. A step of coming out as childfree is a major milestone not only in a woman’s life, but in a relationship to pronatalist norm and thus all those, enacting this norm. This step becomes, regardless to the way childfree women see it, a part in creating publicly visible identity inconsistent with the accepted norm.

At this point it is worth remembering that the mentioned condition of future motherhood is a patriarchal structure, which vigorously disguises an instrumental position of a woman. An issue of women declaring childfreedom (as opposed to those, allowing the illusion of future motherhood), transgress personal matter, confined to their individual choice, and becomes a part of public reality. As Irigaray elucidates in a book chapter Women on the Market, in the patriarchal economy women are commodified through their value for the maintenance and uphold of the current order (1985). The author puts it: “circulation of women among men is what establishes the operations of society, at least of patriarchal society” (Irigaray 1985: 184). Not only are childfree women disturbing the order; they, being instruments and not their operators, are logically incapable of refusal. A childfree woman is not even a worker, refusing to work in a system of compulsory labour; she is an instrument in a hand of that worker. “No doubt, ‘so far as it is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it.... But, so soon as a wooden table, for example steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent.’” (Irigaray 1985: 182).

So one could say that women, unapologetically and openly refusing to execute their assigned purpose become a public issue, threatening to destroy the order. A spoon, suddenly springing forth to claim its unwillingness to carry food to our mouth, would force us to acknowledge its agency and a general, previously unthought-of, possibility of a spoon being violated every time we eat. Likewise, the explicit declaration of childfreedom unmasks the coercive order, by showing discontent with the norm. The futurity, the heterosexual alibi are challenged and so is the entire social order (Edelman 2004). In Edelman’s way of seeing future, based on a stable idea of a child, all women are discursively pregnant. The audible statement of childfreedom is in its
essence an abortion. An abortion in a broader sense than the moralizing pro-life discourse, it’s not merely *killing* of a single future baby, but killing of a future itself.

**Reasons**

Having shown that the norm doesn’t require or even allow an alternative, I suggest that from a normative standpoint there are no non-deviant basis for childfreedom. In other words, no reason is a reason enough for the norm, and any attempt to discuss is futile. However, as I will argue in this section, explaining reasons for childfreedom is important as it allows a glimpse into the women’s reasoning and their inner dialogues with pronatalism. Revealing it will further elucidate the difficulties of challenging the norm and elaborate on the previous subchapters by giving context to decision of childfreedom. In this subchapter I will examine the reasons that my informants present for their childfreedom, yet prior to that, I will consider the complications that a question of reasons may bring up; and my reasoning for why such question is important.

First of all, a question if women at all need reasons should be asked. One does usually have a rationale behind choices in life, but it might be personal, unconcrete and/or unarticulated. Also, as free individuals women shouldn’t need to explain themselves, thus, they shouldn’t need to have reasons for their actions. I thus, have to critically reflect that a question about the reasons for childfreedom carries some inherent pronatalism. The women are once again put in a position where they have to defend a choice, which (in a perfect world) shouldn’t be defended.

However, as social reality and the perceptions it creates are inseparably intertwined with individual views, the question had to be asked for several reasons. First of all, in order to disclose the inner bargaining with the norm, in which the childfree women engage. When doing interviews, motives for childfreedom took up a substantial part of the testimonies, with informants discussing them in a more elaborate way comparing to other addressed issues. Such eagerness to argue for their choice shows considerable attempts to legitimize their childfreedom, and while I argue that the norm ultimately isn’t capable of accepting any reason as valid, the motives expressed by my informants exhibit their attempts to defend their choice.

Social norm is axiomatic, self-explanatory, and the deviance is prescribed the burden to explain itself. The choice of my informants is nonconformist, making it an active visible stance, they are
expected to justify. This justification could seem unnecessary, as I don’t represent the social norm, however, the explanations they so eagerly gave are an important medium between their personal stance and the pronatal discourse. Reasons are protective layers, extending from personal thoughts to political advocacy. This crucial element in each testimony points to a second argument for my choice to explore motives for childfreedom – expressed reasons encompass multiple discussions and arguments that have been had circling childfreedom. All the women talked switching between their own arguments and the society's’ perceptions as they saw it, thus revealing processes of actual discussions (different from previously mentioned inner negotiations) with pronatalist discourse. In some cases I provoked my informants (having explicitly explained it to them), by mimicking the questions that are often repeated to childfree women, and thus triggering the narratives of the earlier mentioned discussions.

Finally, in a normative framework my informants are constantly questioned, but their answers are often disregarded, so the need for a sympathetic ear of a peer must have been a stimulus for the extended explanations. I have certainly been in a place, connected to my childfreedom, where a listening ear and an accepting nod felt refreshingly pleasant. Most situations where the reasons are questioned don’t leave much room for a full, judgment-free disclosure by the childfree, and I am happy I could offer this opportunity.

In a society where motherhood is a norm for women, and an assumed future fact for girls, taking a decision not to procreate automatically puts a woman in antagonism, makes her deviant, and an outcast of the norm. This situation, not always seen this way by my informants, is one way or another reflected in their testimonies. Apologetic tone is often used listing the reasons for childfreedom and the negotiation (inner or in a form of an actual dialogue), is often expressed as an inherent part of the statement. Maria directly refers to the way her reasons for childfreedom are perceived “well, some [of the reasons] might seem a bit childish, <...> I don’t think that it isn’t a family, what we are, I think it is, regardless if we have children or not” she uses two negations in her phrasing - one, mimicking an argument, currently being escalated in the public discourse\(^{11}\) - what is and is not a family; and another to negate it in her own words. The double

\(^{11}\)There has been an ongoing public discussion regarding family concept in Lithuanian constitution. The conception is on a constant attack from conservative political forces, which intent to narrow it down to heterosexual marriage with children, excluding any other family unit.
negation indicates what childfree women are often told as an argument against their choice and what Edelman theorizes as justification for romantic relationship - children create family by giving purpose to the relationship (2004).

The discussion in its core is about the limit between the norm and the deviance, expanding the norm from one side and protecting the traditional values from the other, as while the subject refuses motherhood, others perceiving her and her partner as a family is still important to her. As Sawicki notices, referring to Foucault, antagonisms are multiple, depending on one's intertwining identities, and as is clear from Maria’s testimony, her identity as childfree confront, and is being negotiated with her identity as a family person (1991: 1-17). The outer opposition, with the discourse which denies her relationship the family status on the grounds of tradition and the norm, is contested through individual redefining of family. The norm is not being rejected, only bent by adding individual wishes to the hegemonic must.

Maria continues “I don’t feel that carrying a child, feeding it is something extremely cute and beautiful. I never felt this way <...> I like freedom, I like to travel, to work, to love and I don’t want to commit to a small human being”. Cuteness of a child and the myth of maternity bliss are counter positioned with her lifestyle - everything she finds important. A view of a woman, who has taken a decision of childfreedom appears logical and reasonable, weighing what are represented as arguments for motherhood against what potential sacrifices she sees. Another informant, Iva, also appeals to her lifestyle “a child needs time, it’s a human. And I want to study, I plan an academic career. <...> even if I don’t go into academia, work from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm, I have a lot of hobbies <...> where is the time for a kid?”. The attitude, while slightly apologetic, is based on a position of valuing one's choices. Seemingly reasonable position similar to one expressed by previous informant, however, if we look closer, pronatal discourse is rooted in a must and a sacrifice on a part of a woman. As Irigaray (1993; 1985) argues through her take on psychoanalysis, a woman’s subjectivity is constructed on her services for others, thus taking one’s lifestyle and wishes as a valid argument in the hegemonic discourse of motherhood contradicts the normative view. In a patriarchal pronatalist reality motherhood is a must and a sacrifice.

As I show in a previous part when analysing decision taking, femininity is built on instrumental
position of women. Furthermore, as Irigaray demonstrates in detail in her piece *Women on the Market*, a woman isn’t allowed pleasure, her role is constructed on her use in the patriarchal economy. She is considered, and even at cases considers herself, to be naturally altruistic, frigid (thus only giving in a sexual sense) and instinctively drawn to bearing children (putting their needs before her own) (Irigaray 1985). Hence, the women, prioritizing non-altruistic lifestyle goals are accused and/or claim themselves to be egoists. An egoistic woman once more presents an oxymoron, as seen from the view of the phallocentric order. On one hand, she is condemned (by simply being branded as an egoist) by the society, on the other hand, misunderstood, seen as an anomaly.

Most informants themselves claimed egoism in a surrendering fashion. Some justified their decision without being asked. Yet, all of them addressed the idea of being childless as an egoist act. I will be addressing this notion in the next subchapter, where I will argue that such branding is a disciplining mechanism. However, as most women related to the discourse of egoism in one way or another while presenting their reasons for childfreedom, I cannot avoid discussing it here.

Unfortunately, the cliché of an egoistic career woman is so viral, that most of my informants saw themselves in relation to it. “I don’t see in it some added value for me. Yes, I am an egoist” (Anna). After making this strong disclaimer Anna continues explaining and to a good extend negates her first statement showing a deep consideration for the potential child and the world they would live in: “if a thing doesn’t bring me or the humanity some, well I’m not so egocentric that I wouldn’t realise that there is some future, but I don’t see how my personal specific child would bring something good to the humanity”. Yet another informant, Rita also self-accuses when asked about the reasons for childfreedom: “the reasons that I voiced are very egoistic, what is very often said about childfree [says the last word in English] people, that we are egoistic, which in my opinion isn’t a bad thing, because we think about the person that would be born maybe to people who don’t want it” (Rita, original emphasis). The accusation of egoism is claimed, reconciled and finally an attempt to defend it is made. The women even defend their choice by appealing to rational overall good - well-being of a potential child and the future of the world. A small evil - childfreedom (egoism) is argued in a name of a universal big good - the future.
Rita continues “I tell a reason depending on a group of people (who ask). I say all kinds of nonsense, usually I try to fight off by saying that there are too many people in the world, which is actually true – the world is overpopulated. What else, hmm again, the egoistic aspect when you just don’t want it, you like your life and you don’t want to change it”. First of all she openly states that the reasons for her choice are often excuses made for others. A woman uses words to fight off to describe situations where she finds herself in a position of having to defend her choice. A choice of words, often used in a context of protecting oneself against viscous forces. And indeed, a conversation about the reasons for childfreedom, as I myself experienced on countless occasions, very rarely happen on a mutual ground, but most often takes a hierarchical form of attack, accusations and defence. Defence, which is essentially futile, as reasonable arguments cannot fight off a hegemonic must. The whole discussion, often starting in a form of a question is also only a guise, held up until the moment of contradiction. The seemingly more honest reasons mentioned by the end of Margarita’s statement are obviously too fragile to even attempt a defence of her choices in situations of a pronatal attack.

Iva goes one step further - she approaches the question of reasons rationally, even somewhat mechanically, which suggests multiple previous rehearsals of this very conversation. “I often say to people that I have 1000 and 1 reason to not have children; and one of those is that I don’t want to have a child in this country, this world. <…> Maybe I would do a favour for a kid for not letting it into this world, this regime” (Iva). She mentions the most publicly acceptable reason - a concern for well-being of a potential child, as the only example. She implies that the one reason should be enough, however, she has 1000 more, indicating that it usually is not. Iva’s approach is different from that of the previously discussed informants as she doesn’t explicitly mention the discourse of egoism, instead, she forestalls it in a seemingly rational manner with a position of altruistic concern for the child's well-being. Thus, at least on a level of rational argument, disarming the opposition.

Sometimes, however, the reasons are not only rational, but seem very concrete and straightforward. Viktoria, a lesbian, who had been in a long term relationship is worried for a well-being of a potential child: “psychologists say that one brings a family model from one's family, and I don’t want to give that further. Another reason is that Lithuania is homophobic. I
see my life in Lithuania and a kid has nothing to do with it, we can’t choose a family, and for these circumstances it might be more difficult for a child”. Perhaps Viktoria’s reasons would be different if she was not in a homosexual relationship, however not being a part of the hetero-norm, she has reasons which are widely accepted by both - the open minded liberals, and the homophobes who create the circumstances she mentions. Non heterosexual people’s choice to stay childfree is seen in contradicting ways, but the leading discourse demands a couple of a man and a woman as a precondition for reproduction (Campbell 1999). Most people, not qualifying by this condition, are at least excused from pressure to procreate, at worst - condemned if they do so (Gillespie 2000).

Heteronormativity, as a powerful side of the normative pressure is not an issue for most informants. Not being in same sex relationships, they don’t confront the heterosexual norm, and thus are not in an antagonistic position in relation to it. I previously use Ahmed’s thoughts on normative lines, applying them to pronatalist norm; here, the same reasoning can be used for hetero-norm (which Ahmed herself is primarily concerned with in her text) (2006). According to the author, “lines disappear through <...> alignments” – the norm that one follows, and doesn’t cross, or object, becomes invisible (ibid.: 562). Resulting from the mentioned alignment, most women are prescribed with, and have to negotiate a single deviance12, even though the expressions of normativity are relatively omnipresent and coming from multiple external as well as internal sources. In Viktoria’s case an extra axis of antagonism plays a role, making negotiating identities even more complicated.

A concept of intersectionality is useful in analysing Viktoria’s example (Crenshaw & Harris 2009). Two axes of pressure are active in her case - heteronormativity and pronatalism, unexpectedly resulting in what could almost be called an excuse from motherhood. While in Crenshaw’s examples interlocking gender and race oppressions create black spots in legal system, unambiguously further marginalising the women affected, in Viktoria’s case the result is twofold (ibid.). Whereas the informant expressed dissatisfaction with homophobic discouragement to have children, directed at homosexuals; she also admitted to gain from it. “Once I came out to my mother, her first thought was that she won’t have grandchildren. <...>

12 I don’t deny that there might be other deviances/struggles/oppressions the women battle in their lives, however here I address the aspects that arose in interviews, and I find relevant for my work.
she has this idea that there won’t be children because of my homosexuality. And since this idea fits with my wishes, I don’t touch it” (Viktoria).

During interviews, the telling of the reasons was signified by length and intensity. It proved to be difficult to fully distinguish between the position of my informants, and that of their opponents. The reasons childfree women expressed seems to cover a spectrum from most honest to most declarative and defensive. Moreover, attempting to exit a clearly formed hegemonic norm for an abstract alternative, which, I argue above, they are doing, is complicated. The discussions above show attempts to defend their childfree position and fit it in the normative value system. This mediated stance marks not only an attempted exit out of the norm, but an in-between-ness.

Discussions surrounding such notions as egoist marks the value my informants prescribe to the norm, need for its approval and/or internalisation of the pronatalist discourse. As I see the subjects as to some extend formed by their outer connections, it is impossible (and, I would argue, ethically problematic) to clearly separate my informants’ position from that of the discourse they mimic/internalise. Yet, judging from a) the length and eagerness of explaining the reasons, b) norm being often objected, yet being a reference point, and c) directly told narratives of discussions, it is clear that the inner process of negotiation is intense; and taking a decision doesn’t automatically elucidate a clear shape of childfreedom, or erase the internalised experiences of living in a pronatalist reality.

A Foucauldian idea of multiple identities and struggles is useful here, “[w]ho fights against whom? We all fight against each other. And there is always within each of us something that fights something else” (Foucault 1980: 220). The author rejects an idea of universality and presents identities through multiple, constantly negotiated positions. This multiplicity in constant struggle is helpful in making sense out of what I discuss above. The women show dissatisfaction with pronatalist pressure, and openly state their deviant stance of childfreedom; nevertheless they seem to cling to some aspects of the norm. They attempt to navigate a mediated in-between-ness, where both their choice and the norm are respected and satisfied. I suggest, that Viktoria’s case exemplifies clearest the outer struggle, while other informants’ answers show the burden of inner bargaining with the hegemony.

Finally, instead of suggesting a clear system for approaching reasons for childfreedom, I want to
draw to the beginning of the subchapter, where I account for the pronatalist nature of my question. Since there shouldn’t be a need for reasons, the ones my informants propose sound artificial. That is, I suggest, because they are. While I trust them to be true, in cases of most women, the reasons are mostly for others - not necessary for any other reason than to counteract pronatal discourse, may it be external or internal. Hence, I suggest, that the inextricable entanglement that the reasons for childfreedom appear to be, most clearly, once again marks the viscosity of the norm.

**Pronatal delegitimization**

As I have shown throughout my work up till this part, the powerful pressure is perpetuated to the point, where internalisation is enmeshed with women’s own views. Crucial point is, as I argue in one of previous parts, to openly declare childfreedom, as it exposes the norm and poses a challenge. Having stepped outside of the margin of to-be-motherhood, a woman puts herself in a position against it. Metaphorically speaking, a woman has been inside a belly of a beast and she is now looking into its eyes. The assumed oneness between the notions of woman and mother is lost. In lives of real women, this oneness might have been coerced, loaded onto them as an automatic default setting, and functioning only as a semblance. The pronatalist pressure, executed under this illusion, has a tone of guiding women into the right path, and is marked by a hope of conversion, reconciliation, and thus, a return to the oneness with the norm. Once the declaration of childfreedom is made, this gentle course of action is no longer valid; and the norm is suddenly faced with a challenge. After the illusion of assumed intention of motherhood is dismissed, and acceptable explanations for not having children exhausted, the norm is faced with a direct antagonism, a threat.

Failure to inactivate this threat could cause doubt in legitimacy of the norm itself. In a concrete case of childfreedom the discourse of inherent woman’s urge for motherhood is essential in order for the norm to strive. Valid cases of subjects denying this urge raise doubt about the underlying notion - all women are/will be/want to be mothers. Fortunately for the norm, the unruly subjects do not have agency to actually pose a viable threat. Being a value in the system of exchange (Irigaray 1985; 1993) and a tool for its uphold (ibid.; Edelman 2004), a woman doesn’t possess the subjectivity that is required to constitute a valid opposition. And so the system doesn’t need
to fight her as a threat, but merely to expose her impotence and to discipline, by returning her to
the assigned position.

Gentle questioning becomes increasingly more aggressive when met with resistance. The
voluntarism of the act threatens the entire construction of the feminine lack and desire; our social
order is built upon. As Edelman rhetorically asks: “who would, after all, come out for abortion or
stand against reproduction, against futurity, and so against life?” (2004: 16, original emphasis).
Indeed, the failure to see childfree woman as an error, a fault or invalid of some sort contests the
structure our future is being built on, and thus the very life itself. The system thus employs
mechanisms, naturalised and perpetuated through public discourse, to delegitimize childfreedom
and protect the pronatalist norm. Normative disciplining, targeted at childfree woman, is
relatively omnipresent. Just as pronatal pressure, experienced by all women (but not realised as
such by all), is. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish the former from the latter and in some
cases, for example family and friend relationships, the pressure never stops even after declaration
of childfreedom. As one of the informants describe relationship with her father, long after her
coming out as childfree he still hopes: “maybe you’ll change your mind”. Such a position is a
gentle form of both - pronatal pressure, and delegitimization - undermining her decision in order
to save a semblance of a desired norm.

In a society, where force is not lawfully allowed, deviances are controlled through non coercive
measures. Sawicki suggests, analysing writings of Foucault, that “deviancy is controlled and
norms are established through the very process of identifying the deviant as such” (Sawicki
1991: 39). I already touched upon a notion of egoism, used so often that most women adopted it
as their own view. I suggest that this label is one among many stereotypical notions of deviance,
used in a disciplining way. A negative term egoist is described by Merriam Webster dictionary as
“a person who is overly concerned with his or her own desires, needs, or interests”\textsuperscript{13}. Overly is a
relative term, and, given that women are constructed through self-sacrifice for the good of others
(especially men and children), them prioritizing their goals at all is seen as them overly
prioritizing their goals. When the established norm is a self-sacrificing woman, one not doing it
(or doing to a lesser extend) is seen as an egoist. The accusation thrown at the childfree is thus

\textsuperscript{13} \url{https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/egoist} accessed on 19/12/2016
merely: a person who is concerned with her own desires, needs, or interests.

Childfree women are blamed for executing their de jure right - claiming their own lives. Unfortunately, due to the way gender roles are constructed, such behaviour is seen as natural for men, yet outrageous for women. Feminine sacrifice is what the social order is built upon, and thus refusal of it is significant. By inverting the order of sacrificing themselves to create the world, they sacrifice the world in order to create themselves!

While accusation of egoism is widespread, informants tell of much more brutal labels that are thrown at them. Incognito comments, made by strangers, are described as the most aggressive ones. Rita shares her experiences about a blog she had: “if there is a theme [children related] and one tries to explain the position [of childfreedom], responses are often ‘you are sick, go get checked out, there is something wrong with you’ well maybe something is wrong with me, but this is my position. People live with mental illness and I live too” (original emphasis). The gruesomeness of the comments, directed at the childfree woman illustrates people’s expression when they have no personal, emotional ties with the object of the abuse and are anonymous. The main idea of this raw comment is that childfreedom is abnormal. Foucault explores establishments of normality through deviance and, as Sawicki notices, emphasizes “the maintenance of social control through a marginalization and medicalization of ‘deviancy’ that diverts attention from tolerated ‘abnormalities’ within ‘normal’ social intercourse” (Sawicki 1991: 39). Thus, the accusation is just - when reproduction and pronatalism are the norm, childfreedom is abnormal.

As Edelman insightfully notices, writing about queers and conservatives, the radical opposition has a capacity of recognizing the true essence of a phenomenon, since it has no intent to reconcile, excuse, or appropriate it (2004: 14). The suggestion of sickness, mentioned above, as a form of abnormality is both kind and horrible. Kind, because it doesn’t place the blame on the subject, however by doing so, it condescendingly ignores women's agency. In this sense, an accusation of vicious intention would be much more respectful. Unfortunately, one has to entertain a plausible option of commentators being honest representatives of the norm and thus incapable of imagining any other reason for deviance, as abnormality. What Foucault suggests throughout his works explains the position of the attacker. The discourse of illness has been
historically used as a systematic disciplining mechanism, aimed at the unruly subjects in the system (Foucault 1982; Pickett 1996; Sawicki 1991). Sawicki shows, analysing Foucault, that labelling childfree women as sick establishes the desired norm and at the same time disciplines the deviant ones (Sawicki 1991: 39). Sickness signals exemption from liability, deems a subject unsound, not fit for the norm, thus restoring the hierarchy between the normal and the deviant, neutralising the latter as a threat (ibid.). Any action or argument of such subject is thus automatically rejected and the subject herself is shunned, leaving the norm intact.

Women exhibit attempts to reconcile the deviance they are assigned with. Similarly to the discourse of egoism and sickness, Maria shares an experience of being labelled cruel: “I said it publically once and oh, the horror, I was [seen] like some murderer for not wanting to grow anything in myself - ‘you have no heart, you are an egoist’ I said well ya, I am an egoist, oh well... [sighs].” The response, similar to the one of previous informant, shows the last position of the bargaining. The women are willing to overlook or even accept the condemnation, as long as their choice is validated - this is my position and I live too. Connecting to the last example, where the ultimate defeat is denial of one’s subjectivity and dismissal, acknowledgment of a position, even a deviant, condemned one, is a moderate win.

However, childfreedom is not a strong bargaining position. Hana directly expresses the essence of unequal interaction with pronatalism. She first notes that she doesn’t try to impose her choice on anyone and thus finds it frustrating and hard to understand that “there are many who try to take this choice away from me ‘wait, you’ll grow op, fall in love or get married and the child will appear by itself and you can’t stop it, where are you gonna go’”. I empathise with my informant’s mortification - a discourse of wait and see, it will happen is very prevalent and directly rejects woman’s consent. Not only does it deny her choice, it does it without any ground, other than her gender. While discourses of egoism or sickness claim a pretext for delegitimizing a subject, wait and see, it will happen denies a need for a reason to dismiss her choice. Female embodiment is enough. In this sense the last phrase, while sounding mild, feels most violating.

One of the informants compares refusal of motherhood to refusal of other dominant power -
religion\textsuperscript{14}: “the same was with atheism, when I was 13 I told my teacher that I was an atheist and she responded ‘you’re too young, you’ll grow out of it,’ and I doubted” (Iva). She continues about childfreedom: “the process was to calm myself down, assure myself that my decision isn’t stupid”. Iva’s memories illustrate the violence done to her. She continues saying that the pressure doesn’t affect her anymore, but she went through an emotional process to get to this state: “I used to get upset. First there was the anger – how dare they tell me what to do, then the anger turned into a bit of anxiety – what if they are right, what if I am wrong? This was when I was maybe 22 <...> in the last years, 2-3 years when I get told that, I don’t react <...> I trust myself” (Iva).

The inner motion transits from anger to doubt, and then, to self-assurance. Anger being crucial for the final decision as it is predicated on a confidence in oneself and one’s choices. As Foucault insightfully claims, some amount of power, at least in realisation of one's subjugation, is a preconditions for resistance (Pickett 1996). One can only get angry in a situation where personal freedom is threatened if one has, and is aware of having, personal freedom. The further moment of a doubt marks internalisation of the pressure as well as points to a social capital, needed to resist it. Iva’s starting point is anger, and an attempt for reassurance clearly shows a process she had to go through, to reach her current state of content. The norm proclaimed her childfreedom to be a sign of stupidity - a symptom of incapability to make a decision, following by a dismissing of both - her decision and herself.

Iva’s age plays a role in both - delegitimization and self-reassurance, as immaturity is another accusation thrown at childfree women. Other than being connected with the perceived mental inferiority, age acts as an argument in its own right. Age is regarded as not very accurate, but widely used measurement for maturity. Other used distinction is conformity to the accepted behaviour of certain life periods - acting one's age. However, when it comes to normative womanhood, the fact of having or not having given birth is viewed as a milestone, determining the maturity of a woman. A woman’s development is seen to be complete when she becomes a mother. Many feminists have made successful efforts to debunk gross limitations and inconsistencies of classical psychoanalysis, unfortunately, the initial psychoanalytic ideas about

\textsuperscript{14}Religion in Lithuania is largely seen as a basis for morality and while it plays a role of passive tradition for a big part of the population, openly declaring atheism is often stigmatised.
female maturity still prevail today in the public discourse (Irigaray 1985; 1993; Dinnerstein 1978; Mitchell 1975; etc.). Irigaray distinguishes two roles (and thus two periods), perceived as acceptable for a woman - that of a virgin and that of a mother (1985). The author shows how the transformation from one to another is marked by a milestone of motherhood. Irigaray explores psychoanalytical idea of a child as a substitute for a penis in a paradigm of penis envy, showing how without the experience of motherhood a woman is seen as childlike, unfulfilled (ibid.).

Hana tells about a similar argument: “from an early age we are told, here, one day when you grow up, when you get your own children, you’ll understand”. The phrase, often said to children, gets repeated to adults as well. The rationale behind the saying forfeits an option of renouncing motherhood. The logic of the argument is constructed retrospectively, with motherhood being a qualifying step for making a choice. The saying once you are a mother you will understand, shows the impossibility of the logic - the criterion to be met in order to choose, automatically deems the choice void. The inbuilt condition nullifies any potential challenge, and the importance of individual agency. It predetermines one’s future without consent of a subject - you’ll understand when you have children. Unfortunately, the same logic is used to nullify choices of other groups, such as homosexual people - you can’t say you don’t like women/men if you haven’t tried it (fortunately in such cases, following the argument isn’t irretrievable - a regretful romantic encounter is usually easier to get over, than a baby).

Furthermore, once the criterion is met - a woman has given birth to a child, the same pressure deprives her of retrospectively choosing childfreedom - regret isn’t acceptable. Having entered motherhood, the norm only allows the option of validating the choice (as much as, and if at all, it is a choice). The same pressure to enact correct femininity forbids expression of negative emotions and attitudes, connected to motherhood (Rich 1977). Thus, pronatalism doesn’t cease once a woman is a mother, instead, it transforms into control over correct motherhood, transforming every good mother into an active advocate for motherhood.

As I start showing, while discussing the reasons for childfreedom, and further develop in this section; marking childfree women as deviants works as a tool to discipline them, thus protecting the norm. A label of egoist, even though presented among reasons for the choice of childfreedom, is an internalised accusation, thrown too often at women, refusing to abandon
themselves in order to gain the value in the phallocentric economy. Working under a semblance of free will, patriarchal system allows an illusion of choice, however, as I show above, there are right and wrong choices. Openly communicating one’s decision (it being a \textit{wrong} choice) shatters the illusion, and leaves a bare conflict with the pronatal norm. Systematic disciplining, as showed by Foucault, steers individuals to choose normatively, while \textit{wrong} decisions are nullified, by deeming the chooser unfit to take the choice in a first place (1982).

Above I show different mechanisms the norm employs to delegitimize childfree women. I start by most often used accusation of egoism. I demonstrate how, when analysed, it uncovers a double standard for men and women and illustrates how social order legitimizes and normalizes women’s lesser access to their rights. Other classical mechanisms relegate women by deeming them sick, immature, or inexperienced. And finally, as I show by the last example, sometimes no excuse is claimed, and normativity is presented as overruling women’s consent.

\section*{Subjectivity, agency and the view of self}

In the previous chapters I have shown how pronatalism is embedded in the functioning of the society, how it is enacted in lives of childfree women, and how it behaves when challenged with childfreedom. In this chapter I turn my view towards the women. Childfreedom is a specific position taken in relation to pronatalist discourse and the society as a whole. The way a childfree woman sees herself, conducts herself in a society, inevitably takes her out of the normative line. Childfreedom as an act (or a refusal to act) builds an antagonism and, given that antagonism is between the norm and the refusal to enact it, childfreedom could be seen as an act of resistance.

Looking through Foucauldian lens, an opened conflict carries great potential for discussion and transformation and thus a change in power relations (Foucault 1977; Pickett 1996; Sawicki 1991). However, in Foucault’s approach to power, resistance is not solid, it is a constant struggle, negotiation between multiple inner and outer voices (ibid.). In order to cover this multiple grid of power, and situate my informants in relation to it, I explore their inner dialogues and the positions they (aspire to) take.

Having touched upon some of inner dialogues of the childfree women in the last two
subchapters, in what follows, I look directly at how my informants see their childfreedom. I explore what impact it has on their self-identity and the norm, as seen through their eyes. Furthermore, I will explore their attitudes to their non-normativity and whether they see it as resistance. Perceptions of my informants might be different from one another, and from that of mine. Resistant aspect of childfreedom, not necessarily intended or acknowledged by the childfree women, impacts the way they are seen by the society. Moreover, it influences not only women’s experiences of their surroundings, but also the surroundings themselves, thus having a much greater influence than that of individual self-perception of the women in question.

**Influences on self-identity**

Asked about how the choice of childfreedom influenced their self-identity and self-perception, initially, most women answered, that it did not. “For now I don’t feel it, maybe because I am still young, but I don’t feel it. In ten years when I’ll realise ‘now or never’ it might change. But I hope it won’t” (Lucy). Most women claimed that childfreedom feels natural and is an integral part of their identity. While talking, however, some women, especially older ones, expressed their thoughts regarding their childfreedom and the view of the self.

The fact that I don’t want children doesn’t make me feel any less of a woman. <...> I always had a better connection with the boys, I was ‘one of the boys’ <...> when I grew up (and growing with a man you see a world from a man’s perspective), I have some kind of inner empathy to men, if there is a conflict I first think that it must be a woman that did something wrong, but I myself don’t feel less of a woman. On the other hand, as probably any woman, I hate all the biological processes every month [laughs] and I see them unnecessary and in my teenage years I was very angry at the world [laughs] – why does that happen to me, but it’s probably natural, we all go through it. I used to say that the whole thing should be cut out. <...> I see myself quite objectively, I am a woman, I have these capacities, but I don’t think if I will ever use them (Hana).

Hana presents a conflicted view of her womanhood. On one hand, she claims her femininity, and on the other, rejects, saying that she sees the world from a man’s perspective. As she tells, growing up with a father she developed her subjectivity as a man would - with an unwavering feeling of autonomy and entitlement to her body.

Once again Ahmed’s metaphor of orientations can be useful in analysing the situation (2006). The informant on one hand, constructs her self-identity based on her father’s view - that, which is in front of her, yet this identity is conflicted by her female embodiment. As a result, she
doesn’t only reject motherhood, she rejects all the bodily processes connected to it; and thus claims her gender, but not sex. Objective attitude, claimed by the informant, seems perfectly reasonable, if we operate on an assumption of equal citizenship. Seeing the world from a man’s perspective is consistent with a choice of childfreedom, but a claim of not feeling any less of a woman signals an individual construction of womanhood, rather than association with the hegemonic construct of femininity.

Iva, who identifies as gender nonconforming, expresses even greater dissociation from her body:

I suspect that it [childfreedom] might have had [influence in how I see myself, my body] coz I had a period 2 years ago or so, when I was disgusted by everything women-like <...> At that point giving birth came out as a problem for me. Before that I didn’t think about giving birth as such, I only thought about having kids. <...> the horrible process, which I have to go through, just because I have these reproductive organs? Nonsense I thought and still do.

The informant distinguishes a general fact of having children from a bodily act of giving birth. Listed in chronological order the two aspects of motherhood appear as separate issues, that rose up as her personality was developing. Iva continues describing other aspects of her identity: “I see myself as something in between the feminine and the masculine and thinking about birth hit my self-perception. <...> I don’t feel comfortable that I am expected to produce children and I want to protect my body from it. I want to control my body”.

Discussing her emotions about childfreedom, the informant touches her gender identity. Other, than stating her gender in the beginning of the interview, Iva didn’t emphasize or touch upon her gender identity, until she mentions the topic of childbirth. It appears that, similarly to the last woman, female bodily processes are seen as unwanted and efforts are made to diminish them in their view of self. Moreover, the informant stresses a wish to control her body. She continues indicating that she sees pregnancy as losing control over her body and motherhood as - “hormone infused and then hormone managed”. The feminine mystique, womanhood based on irrational sensuous mothering instinct, praised in western cultures, is seen as a threat to her identity. She doesn’t question the traditional womanhood, but rather disassociates from it by declaring herself as something in between.

Given the informants claimed non binary gender identity, her dissociation from womanhood is expected. Yet I interpret the phrase through what is available to me - our conversation, rather
than a single statement out of context. And while I don’t deny a possibility that she might have been struggling with broader gender identity issues, which she did not elaborate to me; I suggest that her relationship with her femininity, expressed in the interview, signals an attempt to rationalise her feelings towards hegemonic womanhood. Association with both genders was expressed at a single specific point in the interview, connected to what informant saw to be loss of oneself and one's body-control through violent biological processes. Reproductive female biology is rejected as undesirable, in a society which claims it to be the essence of femininity. On the contrary, the traits of her personality that she values - rationality, individualism and being career oriented, are labelled as masculine, and thus, she concludes that this is partly what she is.

Doreen Massey separates public and private spheres as seen through transcendence and immanence (Massey 1996: 117). The home, feminine sphere reproduces and maintains life, while the masculine - public sphere works for greater advances of the humankind (ibid.). My informant’s position can be seen through Massey’s elucidation of the two spheres. Iva claims: “my desired life-style won’t have time for a child <...> And I want to study, I plan an academic career.” As is clear from her aspirations, Iva strives for transcendence, so she rejects motherhood and the traditional feminine domain, claiming the masculine features instead.

The logic, prevalent in the society, assigns value for following differently gendered roles. Massey depicts how creation and maintenance of the civilization is assigned for the men; and creation and maintenance of men - for the women (Massey 1996: 117). Mitchell accurately analyses feminine construction in this logic: “[i]ndeed, sexual difference in the service of reproduction was the only framework within which women were seen until the advent of ‘gender’. The point was, women were not men. Why not? Because they were mothers” (2004: 422). Mitchell pinpoints the essence of sexual difference, affirming my previous suggestion of childfree women, drawing connections with masculine construction of identity, to escape the enslaving aspect of womanhood. The logic of a mother, therefore not a man, if reversed, confirms the reasons I propose for explaining my informants’ partial dissociation with womanhood: I am not a mother, therefore (to some extend) I am a man.

Moreover, as Mitchell notices, the modern separation of gender and sex created a first opportunity for women to escape the totalizing parallel woman equals mother. Both informants
above see womanhood selectively. They reject the biological determinism of the notion and rather build their identity on what Mitchell calls *the advent of gender* (2004). Hegemonic view of womanhood (which, as I show throughout my work, has unfortunately not caught up with mentioned *advent* and still largely operates in an essentialist paradigm woman equals mother) doesn’t accommodate their views and choices, so the women dismantle it into segments and reject the parts that conflict their view of the self.

While postfeminist authors, such as Judith Butler (2006) argue for sex being socially constructed in a similar way that gender is, the sexual difference theorists’ view of biological features, as to some extend prediscursive, is closer to my analysis and the views of my informants. The way they imagine motherhood, together with pronatalism they experience, can be seen as socially constructed; yet the sheer bodily facts, signalling their fertility, are undeniable. The rejection of bodily processes through expressions such as *everything should be cut out*, and the view of pregnancy and birth as repulsive, could even remind gender dysphoria of a young transsexual Agnes in Candace West, and Don Zimmermann iconic article Doing Gender (1987). However, while the authors do demonstrate the mentioned *advent of gender*, and *doing gender* through case analysis of transsexual gender dysphoria, I argue that my informants reject a concrete biologically deterministic frame, into which they, as females, are being coerced through pronatalism. Grosz suggests that “patriarchy requires that female bodies and sexualities be socially produced a lack. This, in some social contexts, is taken literally but also occurs at an imaginary and symbolic level, that is, at the level of the body's morphology and the body image” (1994: 60). The women above, I suggest, to some extend accept this lack as inherent to femininity and thus partly reject the latter.

Other women display a view of the self, which is also based on a selective view of womanhood, yet constructed in a different way than the previous women. Particular identity position is developed by Lucy:

> For a woman her body is very important. A woman always wants to be beautiful, she wants to feel her body. A woman is even sometimes valued by her body in a nowadays society. But the decision didn’t yet have any influence. For me this is so normal and it seems like it should be this way, so I don’t feel anything at all. Femininity is important for me, but it consists of many things and different for each. Body forms, being gentle, goodness, when a person radiates, peacefulness, this is femininity for me. But not necessarily a child. A woman might have five kids, but not
sparkle this femininity.

The informant claims childfreedom to be integral to her self-image as a woman. Selectively adopting standards of femininity she embraces a presentable liberal womanhood. Being a woman is seen as something one *sparkles*, as opposed to the essentialist what one *is*. While in previous cases motherhood is rejected as integral to womanhood, and personally unwanted; Lucy devalues it as irrelevant to femininity. Differently from two cases discussed above, where self-identity is accommodated around the limits of hegemonic gender roles, without questioning the norm itself; the last informant rejects aspects of the norm in order to accommodate her idea of womanhood. It thus becomes clear that the two first informants to a bigger or lesser extend question or allow questioning of their *selves*, while leaving the hegemonic constructions unquestioned; the third one claims her womanhood fully, only sees it through her own standards. She constructs the norm to fit *her* femininity.

This attitude could be seen from personal or broader political perspectives. On one hand, the selective view of femininity could be a personal strategy, adopted in order to avoid confrontation with oneself and the environment; and on the other, a more political view of liberal feminism. The example of a mother of five not sparkling femininity, I argue, is an attempt to discredit womanhood, constructed solely on motherhood. Lucy constructs a standard of femininity, which she can easily fulfil due to her superior social and economic status.

Having shown different ways of accommodating childfreedom in individual identity formation, I finally suggest, that the view, presented in the beginning of subchapter by Hana, where she claims to see her childfreedom objectively - acknowledging her biological capacities to bear children, but deciding not to use them; is just. As Sheila Rowbotham calls upon women: “we have to recognize our biological distinctness but this does not mean that we should become involved in an illusionary hunt for our lost nature” (1973: 62 original emphasis). Only I regret to notice that what we *should* doesn’t yet equal what we *do*, as I show through difficult negotiations above. However, the women above are attempting to do it and, through that, they are attempting to de-essentialize femininity by imagining and/or embodying it differently. The value of their actions to a feminist agenda will be discussed in the last chapter of my work, and for now I will explore other - less ambiguous influences of childfreedom on personal identity formations.
While different women I talked to construct their identity in their own distinct ways, all of them display emancipation and a strong sense of the self. Several of the informants emphasize the empowering effects of childfreedom, with personal liberation being the main one:

I became more free as a person. At one point when I thought that I need it [children], I was stuck on one thing. I thought that I have to purposely work towards it, now I live differently. I realise that every day is good, it doesn't have to be a weekend. I started valuing people, travels. I see the world differently. I even became more opened. It freed me. Other people's opinion stopped affecting me. There is this thing when you realise that you are responsible for your own decisions and that you have not only right, but an option, possibility to choose (Lucy).

Lucy lists a scheme for an ultimate liberation. Stepping out of the compulsory scheme, allocated to her, changed her view. She lists changes from casual positive emotions to personal revelations, concluding with discovery of one’s rights and freedoms.

Her realisation of any day being good reminds of a saying Mondays are ok, it's your job that sucks. Monday, being the first and thus the hardest work day of the week, symbolises the end of pleasure, activities one freely chooses to do; and work - activities one is strained to do in order to sustain oneself, thus ultimately, survive. In this comparison motherhood become weekdays - a compulsory labour for the survival in the social economy. And so the realisation that one can opt it out can be compared with winning a lottery. A decision, allowing to full time engage in pleasurable activities, making any day into a weekend. The intense testimony does allude to a new-found freedom of a prisoner, affirming claims that women are subjugated by exploring their biological potential as child-bearers, made by gender theorists, cited in this work (eg. Irigaray 1985; Federici 2012; Mitchell 1984; etc.). The impact childfreedom has in construction and/or perception of a self is correspondingly powerful to the oppression of a discourse, enslaving a woman in her own (perceived) biological potential.

Not only is childfreedom compared to liberation from a compulsory labour, it is at times presented as resulting in an actual bettering of material conditions. An alleviated strain of investing into future economic well-being is mentioned as a factor. Anna describes a new found peace after taking the decision to remain childfree.

It just got more peaceful coz before there was a feeling of instability when one doesn’t know, somehow in theory one should prepare, maybe there are going to be these children, so you should prepare somehow from economical side to have conditions, so the child doesn’t have to eat plain
Anna makes a nearly identical claim - that the decision freed her from the burden of future responsibility. Part of the claim could be seen as unexpected, as economic support of a family traditionally falls heavier on the man’s shoulders. However, with children seen as primary responsibility of a woman, she is expected to worry about all aspects of their well-being. Furthermore, as materialist feminists bring to our attention, a construct of family and the institution of motherhood are interdependent (Mitchell 1984; Rich 1977; Federici 2012). Not only that, they are constitutive in creation and maintenance of economic and social order (ibid.). This could explain why the informant sees motherhood as servitude, directly connected to paid labour; and childfreedom - as liberation from a part of it.

The informant’s view of hypothetical future motherhood echoes Edelman’s arguments of enslavement to the idea, a future possibility of a child. At this point the women don’t address hardships of actual motherhood, as materialist feminists do, but rather the burden of working for the idea of it. Viktoria’s explanation elaborates: “for the development of a personality it had some influence, that I feel more free. <...> People who plan children have to plan more – the finances, security (smart people do that).” Decreased responsibility and increased financial freedom to risk and indulge can translate into freedom to choose less paying job dear to one’s heart, freedom to work less and increased mobility to seek career. As raising a child requires a lot of expenses, childfreedom is beneficial from an economic point of view, and thus might be an adding factor to the personal freedom.

However, I shall add, while these conditions are relevant for the economically privileged women, it might translate into the opposite for women of lower socioeconomic status (a poor childfree/less woman might be in a position where she has to work full time in a job she dislikes, and do the second shift at home, battling pressure and stigmatization in the family/community). Thus, my informants’ described freedom doesn’t only present advantages of childfreedom, but points to their privileged position.

While some women describe their new-found freedom as mainly connected to better economic conditions, Angela describes vague, but broader benefits: “this refusal is very ... well influences you so that you find and discover completely other things that are interesting and not necessarily
fit this normative scheme, which is supposedly assigned, allocated to you as a woman.” She sees rejection of motherhood as a step in rejecting broader hegemonies in life. Angela’s thought distinguishes other, non-normative interests as eye opening. Childfreedom is seen as a different base for construction of self-identity, non normative womanhood, or, hinting from her comment, even deconstruction of it.

The testimonies show, that for the interviewed women, childfreedom had an impact in construction of the selves, and asserting their freedom. Construction of gendered identities is clearly a complicated and multidimensional affair, when one dissociates from the main aspect of the assigned role. Childfree women, not having the privilege and the burden to blindly conform (as their childfreedom automatically disallows it), make a bigger or lesser effort to segment the notion of femininity (and masculinity). Individually reimagined fragments of hegemonic ideas are adopted and very different non-normative identities emerge. Positive impact of childfreedom can be seen from the subchapter above. Women feel freer, at ease and show increased potential for non-traditionally feminine life choices. I will address meaning and importance of their choices in the last chapter of my work, as many of the statements hint to privileged position preconditioning their choices. For the next part I will continue my analysis by addressing my informants’ viewpoints of their actions. I will explore what influence, if any, they think their decision has to their surroundings and the society.

**How they think society is affected**

I will continue my analysis by looking into how the childfree women see environment to be affected by their choice to not procreate. How they position themselves between their childfreedom and the pronatalist norm, what if anything they want to manifest, and think they end up doing? Attempting to gain most genuine responses, I avoided projecting my view of resistance in a way it is formed in my text. Thus, when interviewing the women, I didn’t explicitly ask whether they see their childfreedom as resistance, and instead used a question “how do you think society is affected by your childfreedom?”, supplementing it with questions, mentioned above. Throughout this subchapter I collect my informants’ views on their influence to their surroundings, from their closest environment to the whole society and the pronatalist norm. I isolate aspects, which I later in the text analyse through a grid of my concept of
resistance as a transgression of, and challenge to the norm.

While openly communicating childfreedom to their surroundings was something all women claimed to do, (as I discuss in the subchapter Articulation – Difference Between not Having and not Wanting children), their view of the influence of their actions appeared to be much more divided and fragmented. Being asked how they think their surroundings and the society are influenced by their actions, the majority of the women didn’t give clear answers. While talking on interviews, it was clear that the question came unexpected, and most women haven’t thought too much about this aspect of their childfreedom. Seemingly as a result of that, the answers were often reactionary - based on their feelings towards the responses and the pressure they receive. Starting from partners and closest relatives, most of the women continued by positioning their childfreedom as countering the different forms of pronatalism they encounter, and the agents enacting them.

Influences on their immediate environment were often mentioned first. “If we take my friend circle, I don’t think that they care much, but relatives, the older people <...> they are experiencing disappointment, same with parents” (Iva). Lucy also mentions her decision as causing disappointment for her family, but adds that “work environment would only clap at me for this decision [laughs] because <...> career”. “Aspect of pity” coming from her family is pointed out by Rita. Most women mention indifference or negative emotions they think to be causing to their environment, however one informant, Anna, sees inspiring and supportive qualities of her childfreedom:

I have a couple of younger friends, who got very happy when they got to know this, coz they said ‘here, I will have an example and I will be able to say, when I am pressured about children, there will be a person I can lean on while arguing for my decision. Not necessarily to remain completely childfree, but also to not have children now’ coz she is young, 22. She says that ‘I would like to at least wait until 25-26, but I feel a strong pressure now as I just got married.

Broader influences on the society are seen in two opposing views - as negative and as positive. Both outlooks are again, one way or another, connected to a perceived feeling of disappointment. The first way to see effects of childfreedom, expressed by some women, marks their acknowledgment of it as problematic. Rita identifies effects for Lithuania: “for the country it’s this aspect where I don’t raise the demography, I’m bad, half a country have emigrated, the
cauliflower-folk are rising\textsuperscript{15}, will also leave soon [ironically] and above all, I don’t have babies [laughs]”. Lucy also mentions aging population as an issue she is contributing to: “if there were more people like me, which is already happening, this process of aging society <...> this is more global problem”.

However, even though they identify their actions as detrimental in principle, they are not seen as having a significant effect. “I don’t see it relevant to be honest. If me, or a thousand women chooses not to have children, I think the numbers are too small to change something. Like a needle in a haystack. But to put it drastically, if two out of three women wouldn’t want to have children, then everything changes” (Hana). While acknowledging the negative effects, Hana dismisses them on a ground of not being statistically significant. Maria also mentions demography, only she doesn’t see it as a problem: “so let’s say we all decide now not to have children and so on. So what would happen – we’d all live our lives, die, and that’s what would happen”. Above quoted Rita, when asked about how she feels regarding her own identified demographic issues, answers “[I feel] nothing. There comes the aspect of egoism. Ok, they are leaving [refers to emigration], but it’s not mine, it’s their problem. The same answer is given by Lucy “[I feel] no-how [laughs apologetically] I don’t feel guilty against myself or anyone else”. As becomes apparent, even the women, who in principle see diminishing population as a negative development, refuse to connect it to effects of their own actions, and either deems their input insignificant, or see the whole issue through individualistic prism - as none of their responsibility, and thus - concern.

An opposing view is expressed by other women. Childfreedom is considered to have overall positive effects, and it is seen by them through indignation and resistance towards traditionalism and pressure to fulfil a certain assigned role. The immediate, interpersonal pronatal pressure, as I show in the first part of my work, is mostly exercised by relatives, partners and friends. However, the broader discourse, pushing women to conform to traditional gender roles, is advocated by public figures, mostly politicians and religious authorities. The women describe effects of their childfreedom through expressing their understandings of how their actions would

\textsuperscript{15} The informant refers to a wave of protests, taken place in May of 2016 throughout Lithuania. The protests started by an image of overpriced cauliflower, shared virally on social media; and grew into street protests around Lithuania against rapidly rising prices and dropping living standards.
affect those, in power to legislate and affect public understanding, thus, as is seen by the women, the primary source of pressure they experience.

Reactions of the most extreme opposition are joyfully imitated - women imagine anger and disappointment of the pronatalists, nationalists and racists.

One I hear [most often] is ‘if we don’t have children, the Chinese will come and we’ll all become yellow and narrow-eyed’. My argument to all that is that the world is already overcrowded and I don’t see any need to burden it with extra human beings. It’s better to adopt, that will make a child happy and it’s going to be better for Lithuania; and on the other hand, artificial upkeep of a nation by some forced means won’t give any use. If it’s meant for the nation to disappear, if only these kind of artificial engines are keeping it alive, it means this nation is not vital any more <...>. And no matter how much we dislike them, these traditions will disappear, they will assimilate into the global world. I think it would generally be better for the world if there was no economic and political separation, borders only create conflicts. You can’t fight your neighbour if he’s the same – if he’s a citizen of the same country. So I think this is one of the best reasons to [not have children]. Who cares if he’s a Chinese or Japanese if he’s a good person (Anna).

Arguing through antagonism Anna discloses her political views and inverts racist rhetoric to establish her decision to not have children as a positive act for Lithuania and the world. From her perspective not only are the arguments for having children wrong, they create enough ground to not have them. She sees her childfreedom as refusing to become instrumental in racist, nationalists’ agenda. Through the radical opposition, pronatalism gets framed as a token of what she ideologically despises, and so the act of childfreedom becomes an act of resistance against nationalism, racism and traditionalism.

Another informant takes even more joy in personifying the discourse of white supremacy in distress. Iva uses mockery “since I belong to the white race, the poor disappearing white race [says ironically], so I think people who are nationalists and all the white race [advocates], they would probably be unhappy about one more white young healthy female [uses a word that is used exclusively for animals] refusing to give birth”. The factor of resistance isn’t explicitly articulated, but it’s clearly implied. The women above position themselves as liberal, open minded individuals by emphasising their disapproval of the traditionalist views; and thus as they articulate their childfreedom, it gets established as a way to fight it. Both views, explored above, recognize demographic issues, aging population, and an often publically articulated threat for the survival of Lithuania. However, some women adopt an understanding of the demographic issues as a problem, while others see it to be a positive development.
Viktoria expresses a similar object of antagonism, but being a lesbian, constructs her opposition in a different way. As I discussed previously in my work, homosexuality presents a separate axes of pressure (next to pronatalism), as homosexual women are *excused* from reproduction for being too deviant to produce offspring for traditional model of society. Viktoria experiences a conflicting intersection of pronatalism and homophobia: “for me thinking [about motherhood] is a bit like a form of protest, <...> a lot of people say ‘do what you want, just don’t go public and don’t touch children’ so then I get a wish to get a child and play a poster family”. For Viktoria, differently than other informants, childfreedom bears an ambiguous meaning. In rejecting motherhood, she counteracts one of the pressures, aimed at her - pronatalism, but favours another - homophobia. This said, Viktoria’s decision is ultimately based on a concern about the well-being of a potential child, the earth, and human rights based approach to society: “The populations would naturally reduce, would naturally get in tune with the earth [if there were more childfree individuals]”.

While the previous argumentation is mostly based on an intention to upset undesirable order, Iva articulates similar concerns through positive imaginaries “I think we should have less babies, because the earth is of limited size, limited resources, so at least those who have a possibility to not give birth, should remain childfree. There are people who don’t have this chance, so if you don’t want to give birth and have possibilities to avoid it, don’t”. The argument is based on an idea of global balance and so the informant sees her childfreedom as one of the ways to reach it. Furthermore, she doesn’t only defend her choice, but advocates it, presenting it as a resistance to a slow destruction of the Earth.

Iva’s statement above touches another theme, mentioned by the women in describing their view of childfreedom. She mentions women who don’t have a chance to choose childfreedom. Viktoria goes further and articulates an act of free choice made by a woman, as an act of resistance. “It’s a form of protest, I have my free choice, my decisions, I am a free person and I can decide for myself. With feminism – same – I, as a woman, have a right to decide what to do with my body. And I am using that right” (Viktoria). Exercising *de jure* right is seen as an act out of the ordinary - a form of protest, exemplifying what the previous informant touches upon, and what I show throughout my work - in a de facto pronatalist reality exercising childfreedom (ones
"De jure" right) is an extraordinary act, not accessible to all. Viktoria continues by imagining a changed society without pronatal dogmas “thinking about this natural progression of society that I talked about, it would be interesting if all women would make these decisions freely. What would society become? I think more women would refuse to give birth, there would be more feminists [smiles].”

Finally, only one informant explicitly expresses seeing her childfreedom as a form of resistance:

I think in one way or another I would connect to it feminism. This <...> childfreedom, this principal is pretty old and as much as I have read, I have gone into it, not about childfreedom, but in general, I think it is a totally legitimate resistance to this social environment, and structure, and pressure. I think the less personal this decision is, the better. I mean that <...> you feel being a part of a certain movement and a part of <...> some sort of resistance (Angela).

Overall the question of women’s own views of their childfreedom proved to be the most difficult for my informants to answer. Moreover, the answers I got were more diverse and undeveloped, as compared to answers to other questions I asked. It proved to be much easier for my informants to describe what is more directly connected to themselves - reasons for their actions, the pressure they receive and the reactions they get for their childfreedom. I suggest that all of the above mentioned, are factors, connected to what women receive from the norm – the pressure, the disciplining; and their reactions, ways of dealing with it. This part of the questions allows a passive, reactionary position. Women’s views on the effects of their actions, on the other hand, require them to take broader responsibility, it provokes them to leave the domain of individual choice and position themselves in relation to a broader struggle. And as the answers to the last question revealed, most women refused to take the step.

However, as I didn’t prompt my informants with an option of an answer in a form of a formulated idea of resistance, their answers are undeveloped and fragmented, yet telling. Majority of the women used a lens of disappointment to describe the effects of their actions. Positioning themselves as either satisfied with the caused disappointment (as in examples of traditionalists and nationalists), or expressing indifference (as with most other cases), and in several single cases positive influences were named. Positive view towards upsetting the norm can most clearly be seen as resistance. While pronatalism was mentioned only as one of the factors they object, a recurrent thread of resisting becoming instrumental in racist-nationalist
discourse and the destruction of earth is evident.

The women, expressing resistance, don’t name pronatalism as the only target; they instead form a much broader object of opposition. Yet, insightfully, in naming slightly different evils, the women express intentions to resist their own instrumental position in it. Thus, while the pressure is seen in different ways: as nationalism, racism, traditionalism, or overpopulation of the earth; all of the women, who expressed intents to resist it, are resisting pronatalism as a main instrument in sustaining the mentioned structures.

**Discussion: childfreedom as an act of resistance? How does childfreedom affect/disrupt the norm?**

Throughout my work up to this point, I have employed the testimonies of my informants and showed the depth of pronatalism, rooted in our society; and the struggle between it and childfreedom. In the last part, I have analysed the testimonies of my informants and presented the way they construct their identity as connected to their childfreedom, and their view on influences of their actions. Having concentrated on in-depth analyses of the women’s testimonies, and extracting tendencies of their experiences and perceptions, I kept my interventions to a minimum. In this chapter I move to a more abstract conceptual level and will interpret my informants’ childfreedom through my own interpretation of the phenomenon. I will examine childfreedom through views of my chosen theories and authors.

I will begin by asserting the pronatalist norm through theoretical arguments of the authors of my choice. I will demonstrate how women are exploited as instruments in upkeep of the system, based on the notion of a child; and argue that the different theoretical views, together with my empirical findings, demonstrate the pronatalist norm. Therefrom I will explore childfreedom as a form of resistance to the pronatalist norm. To do that, I will first establish my view of resistance and its relationship to the norm, followed by discussing conditions, potentially allowing resistance. I will then discuss childfreedom through a grid of views of my chosen authors. Beginning from establishing general fact of resistance and hinting to its limits, I will continue by examining childfreedom’s relation to the positions, women are allowed in the pronatalist norm. I
will conclude that childfreedom does constitute an act of resistance, yet not unambiguously. I will finally explore the limitations of childfreedom’s resistant qualities in the last subchapter and conclude, that my informant’s position is twofold. While they reject motherhood itself, other systemic aspects take over to a certain extent, thus hindering resistant qualities of their act.

**Establishing the norm**

As I have established at the beginning of my work, using Edelman, a child, as a token of future is an ideal of any political system. “Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we're collectively terrorized; <...> fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop” (Edelman 2004: 29). Edelman’s uncompromising phrase of rage emotionally summarizes his main point - the entire order we live by is based on a mirage of an always in-the-future child.

Disconnected from actual children the notion is powerful in its imperishable intangibility. Edelman makes a swiping generalisation by claiming that the social order is based on the notion of a future child. He thus identifies a problem in a seemingly primitive way, which in its essence would be contested by most post-structuralist scholars, objecting one source of power or oppression. However, his conceptualisation of the universally aspired futurity - the image of a child, is not elaborated as a singularity, but rather as a destination in a relatively universal value system. The child is an emblem for future, which is interchangeable with hope and ultimately - the essential good (Edelman 2004).

And so the systems of oppression are multiple, only they all work under a pretext of honouring this highest value. Being integral to the hegemony, the idea of a child is a vehicle, driving the ideology forward. Moreover, as the end justifies the means, any mishaps and sufferings are vindicated by an idea of investing in the future. The system employs everybody in its upkeep, however women are most directly instrumental as they are direct producers of the future - children, and thus crucial for not only physical survival of the system, but also the ideological direction of future.

In the first chapter of my work, I have demonstrated how being a woman is automatically associated with being a (future) mother. This notion, as seen from a perspective of sexual
difference theorists, is rooted in women’s bodily facticities, a sheer ability (assumed or real) to give birth; and creates a prediscursive tension (Lykke 2011: 106-123). Adding an aspect of social order, operating on a pretext of the always-in-the-future child (Edelman 2004), tips the scale from tension to a hegemonic rule. Women’s bodily ability to conceive, carry and give birth to a child is employed globally by patriarchal regimes, under a guise of building a better future for the generations to come. Maternal bodily abilities are indispensable for future production, and so women become subjugated as instruments for reproduction of the system.

I have shown through my informants’ experiences, how this described system works on a micro level. Expectations and pressure the women receive from their close environment and the society, are based on their assumed ability, and wish to become mothers. Girls are introduced to motherhood as a future fact and not as an option they can choose. Pronatalism is executed by relatively all groups of influence. The pressure starts from mothers, who are the first female role-models, and, as I have suggested, bear heaviest the responsibility for training their daughters to enact the correct femininity. The pressure is furthermore supported by all older women - mothers in general. Pronatalism, executed by men, is characterised by control. Romantic partners, being the closest, most intimate male connection, exhibit gentle, yet most intense pressure. Finally, friends and peers, together with younger women, act as pronatal agents as well, even though some informants saw this as the least rigid pressure and peers’ views as possible to transform. The hegemonic direction for future child is supported by relatively all people in women’s’ lives. And so the construction of motherhood, as central to femininity, and a default function of any woman is maintained in practice through social interactions.

Women’s instrumentality in the pronatalist order is demonstrated by Irigaray (1985, 1993). While Edelman doesn’t specifically address women’s position, but rather general society’s condition, Irigaray elaborates on women’s exploitation. She claims the magnitude of the problem and sees women’s instrumentality to be an oppression, which is integral, if not central, to the global system of conduct “[i]n our social order, women are "products" used and exchanged by men. Their status is that of merchandise, ‘commodities’” (Irigaray 1985: 84). Again, as Edelman does with the impact of the future child (2004), Irigaray names a supposed feminine lack to be instrumentally translated into countless forms and aspects of oppressions. The works of Edelman
and Irigaray are different and complex, yet aided by feminist materialists’ (Mitchell 1984; Rowbotham 1973; Federici 2012; etc.) insights, they cover the thesis and the antithesis of the same social order - the problem and the solution. Edelman explores the construction of lack and its fulfilment in the symbolic order, and Irigaray, with feminists materialists, analyses how this lack is filled through both – symbolic and real sacrifice of women.

Women are the inevitable instruments in the symbolic order of futurity. As Irigaray puts it: “women's bodies - through their use, consumption, and circulation - provide for making social life and culture possible, although they remain an unknown ‘infrastructure’ of the elaboration of that social life and culture” (Irigaray 1985: 171). Pairing Edelman’s insights on what he calls reproductive futurism (2004) with exposure of commodity status of women (Irigaray 1985; Mitchell 1984; Federici 2012; etc.), I suggest, gives an overall view of the pronatalist norm, and grounds my informants’ experiences theoretically.

A variety of tools, used for systematic establishment and maintenance of the pronatalist hegemony, are identified by different feminist authors. Irigaray distinguishes psychoanalysis as a conceptual instrument for systematic women’s imprisonment in their own reproductive potential (1985; 1993). Together with feminist psychoanalysts such as Juliet Mitchell (1975), Irigaray (1985) shows how modern women’s oppression is substantiated by psychoanalytic lack, rooted in female biology. Psychoanalysis - one of the most influential modern theories is seen as conceptual basis for institutionalization of women’s inferiority (Irigaray 1985; 1993; Mitchell 1984). Mitchell goes further in analysing the socio-political structures of oppression, based on the mentioned psychoanalytic lack and together with other authors, identifies institutions, maintaining the social order. Nuclear family with gender roles based on biological determinism is the first establishment, identified by Mitchell (1984; 1975). An institution of motherhood is isolated by another second wave feminist Adrienne Rich (1977). The author offers a valuable distinction between motherhood as a prediscursive act and as an institution: “potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the institution, which aims at ensuring that the potential - and all women - shall remain under male control” (1977: XV original emphasis).

The authors, mentioned above, represent different theoretical strands, identifying the root of
oppression differently. I however, agree with Foucault as he refuses to focus on identifying a single oppressive power, and instead analyzes various agents enacting power, and mechanisms, used to exercise it (Foucault 1977; Pickett 1996). According to Sawicki, Foucault refuses to give a grand narrative of oppression, and, similarly to most other authors I use in my work, sees sexual difference as being exploited by the oppressive powers; and not as being a source of oppression (Sawicki 1991). “Disciplinary power was not invented by the dominant class and then extended down into the microlevel of society. It originated outside this class and was appropriated by it once it revealed its utility” (ibid.: 24). Sawicki, summarising Foucault’s thought distinguishes different disciplinary mechanisms, and suggests that power is diverse, and the control is exercised through multiple external as well as internalised sources (ibid.).

Foucault’s pluralistic view doesn’t only allow me to employ different theoretical approaches, touching on a topic of pronatalism. It is consistent with findings from the empirical part of my work - the pronatal pressure is relatively omnipresent - coming from different directions, starting from relatives and romantic partners, and ending with anonymous commentators on the internet. Leitmotifs of the duty to continue a family line, ensure the survival of the nation, and expressed surprise and outrage with refusal to comply, exemplify how the mechanisms, identified by different authors above, intertwine, overflow and penetrate women’s daily interactions. And so, my analysis of the social pressure and the underlying reproductive futurism demonstrate the invisible pronatalist norm.

**Establishing resistance**

Having demonstrated the establishment of the pronatalist norm, I will now elaborate on my view of resistance, and discuss childfreedom in relation to it. I mainly adopt a Foucauldian understanding of resistance and its relationship to the norm. The author sees the two elements as tightly connected, even co-constituitive. Resistance, or transgression (Foucault uses several terms interchangeably, in different periods of his work (Pickett 1996: 447)), challenges the norm and exposes its limits. The very relationship between the norm and resistance is one of limits and their perpetual transgression (Foucault 1982; Pickett; 1996). And while Foucault, like Edelman, rejects a possibility of absolute victory over the norm/power (Pickett 1996), he claims that “[t]ransgression forces the limit to face fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what
it excludes (perhaps, to be more exact, to recognize itself for the first time)” (Foucault 1977: 35).

For Foucault, and I agree with him, transgression of normative limits is what allows the existence of a non-normative subject, as it exposes the limits of the norm and reveals its artificiality “[t]ransgression <...> affirms limited being – affirms the limitlessness into which it leaps as it opens this zone to existence for the first time” (ibid.). Thus, resistance, or transgression, is what exposes, challenges the norm and opens possibilities for alternatives. Resistance is what corrodes power by splintering it (as it itself is powerful) and thus disallows a total domination, but instead maintains a wavering relationship, in which a breach of the limits is possible, and so is redistribution of power (Foucault 1977; Pickett 1996; Sawicki 1991).

Before discussing if my informants resist the norm in a way that I discuss above, I need to explore the conditions, potentially making it possible. Thus first of all, since I show the intensity and omnipresence of pronatalism, a question of how and if at all resistance is possible in this environment, should be asked. As Foucault claims, even though power and resistance are co-constitutive, resistance requires some freedom, at the least internal, in a form of realisation of one’s subjugation (Foucault 1977). Pickett presents Foucault’s thought “power is only accepted to the degree that it is hidden, this insurrection of knowledge will lead to direct action against the central institutions of contemporary culture” (1996: 452). Thus, first of all, realisation of the power – its exposure is necessary for its objection.

Questioning the norm by considering childfreedom exposes the limits of assumed free choice. As I have shown in the empirical part of my work, questioning motherhood gives rise to pronatalist pressure, which intensifies as motherhood gets rejected. Thus, attempt to go astray from the normative line, as Ahmed (2006) calls it, or even considering it, exposes naturalised pronatalism. It has become clear from the empirical part of my work, that deciding to remain childfree discloses discrepancies between de jure and de facto rights. While conforming to the normative woman’s role makes pronatalism invisible, attempts to use one’s right to reject it, exposes the unwritten social mores, thus displaying the limits to potentially be transgressed.

While exposure of the norm is the first and crucial step, a certain amount of freedom, in a form of material conditions, is necessary for a corporeal act. Adrienne Rich (1977) points to a painfully obvious fact that the mentioned transgression - choosing (non)motherhood hasn’t ever
before been an actual option. Historically the idea of women’s inbuilt urge for motherhood hasn’t been contested as there simply were no material conditions to enable empirical questioning of the idea. Even without considering cultural, economic and hierarchical constraints, a mere fact of non-existence of contraception before the 19th century, testifies the impossibility of childfreedom. Only with modern contraception a choice became practically possible.

While empirical impact of the Pill has limitations, it helped create a discursive alternative. Mitchell (1966) praises the coming of the Pill as transformation enabling voluntary (non)motherhood, and I agree with that. However, the Pill itself is only a tool to execute the choice (which I by no means depreciate), it doesn’t allow it. Considering social-political structures, controlling women’s choices as well as material conditions, needed to access it, the Pill did not completely revolutionise women’s choice. It did however, as Mitchell notices, enabled separation of sex and reproduction, aggravating the system.

The naturalised woman’s role as a mother, the main pillar of control, suddenly faced a danger of an actual option of ruling motherhood out: “[t]he fact of overwhelming importance is that easily available contraception threatens to dissociate sexual from reproductive experience – which all contemporary ideology tries to make inseparable, as the raison d'être of the family” (Mitchell 1966: 33). And thus while in real life the Pill didn’t overturn motherhood as institution, as it is promoted and seen as a way of planning motherhood and not opting it out; it did discursively create a base for imagination of the modern childfree. This initial separation of sex and reproduction didn’t only create a real life achievable alternative for motherhood, enabling individual childfreedom, it established a conceptual antagonism by enabling the alternative, facilitating tools for its realisation. The possibility of discursive separation of sex and reproduction, facilitated by the Pill, created an imaginary of refusal of motherhood, and so fulfilled Foucault’s mentioned conditions for emergence of resistance. Thus, having throughout my work shown the hostility of social pronatalism, in which the phenomenon of childfreedom occurs, I now pointed to some of crucial preconditions enabling childfreedom: consciousness of the oppressive norm and a discursive, as well as material, potentiality its rejection.

Above I present the conditions that allow for childfreedom, as an alternative to the pronatalist
norm, to occur; yet a question whether this act constitutes resistance, remains. Edelman and
Irigaray are the two main authors I use to demonstrate the oppression of pronatalism, thus I will
first turn to their thoughts in order to answer the question above. I will begin with Edelman, as I
use his writings to establish an overall climate of pronatalism. The author’s idea of resistance to
the hegemonic futurity is *queer*. Edelman conceptualises the term, as the other to the norm of the
*reproductive futurism*, and an enactment of the death drive (2004).

Queerness exposes sexuality's inevitable coloration by the drive: its insistence on repetition, its
stubborn denial of teleology, its resistance to determinations of meaning (except insofar as it
means this refusal to admit such determinations of meaning), and, above all, its rejection of
spiritualization through marriage to *reproductive futurism*. (Edelman 2004: 27)

The psychoanalytical concept of death drive is used by Edelman as an antithesis of the symbolic
order and is positioned as resistance to all that the author means by *reproductive futurism* (ibid.).
Queerness for Edelman embodies rejection of the norm, but not a utopian solution. Any attempt
to resist the current order would require an ideal, an imaginary, and thus be oriented into
improvement, which, according to Edelman, ultimately contributes back to the normative system
(Edelman 2004).

Edelman’s view is consistent with Foucault’s. Foucault rejects an idea of utopia and “repudiates
the desire to oppose the current law in the name of a new law. Such a desire is, in his view, self-
defeating” (Pickett 1996). Both authors see utopian narratives as inevitably contributing back to
the system. As Edelman articulates in an interview commenting on his book “we’ll always
exclude something and that exclusion will be then the locus of queerness, which is why there
cannot be a queer utopia. <...> liberation always presupposes that there is a ‘there’ to be liberated
to” (Research Center for Cultures 2015). Again, similarly to Foucault, even though Edelman
doesn’t offer a solution for a revolutionary subject, he does describe a resistant subject (Pickett
1996; Edelman 2004). Destructive refusal doesn’t require an imaginary, merely a rejection of the
existing one. Thus a death drive led queer could be juxtapositioned with a childfree woman
through the *I would prefer not to*\(^{16}\) attitude of a passive resistance. (Edelman 2004). Liberated
from the conscription of futurity, and instead rooted in the jouissance of embodying the death
drive, Edelman’s queer doesn’t propose an alternative to the system, yet allows personal

\(^{16}\) *Melville, Herman* (1853). *Bartleby the Scrivener.*
liberation (Edelman 2004: 30).

While Edelman’s *queer* is more concerned with philosophical rejection of what author calls *reproductive futurism*, childfreedom can be seen as a most direct form of its embodiment (2004). The author isn’t concerned with such literal interpretation of resistance, however he claims that “queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one” (ibid.: 17). According to the author, the main feature of queer, as a resistance to the idea of a future child, is rejection of investment into the symbolic future. Several of my informants expressed disinterest in the survival of the nation, state and the social order, and claimed to be indifferent to the consequences of their childfreedom. This attitude to some extend fulfils Edelman’s description of a queer, as a subject who rejects “a better society, a brighter tomorrow”, and the sacrifice of oneself for the symbolic future (2004: 30). As I am not using the notion *queer* in its direct sense - nonheterosexual, but rather as a broader subject of resistance to what Edelman calls reproductive futurism, childfree women constitute a queer subject.

Other than refusing a bodily act and some of its ideological extensions, however, most of my subjects fail to live up to Edelman’s description of queer. While the women disrupt the future oriented hegemony, at least some of them do attempt to construct an identity, based on their childfreedom; or incorporating it in otherwise normative identity construction. As is clear through different statements from interviews, the women are investing (or at least expressing intentions to invest) in the future - they see their childfreedom as transformatory, bettering the reality for themselves, and in many cases - for the society. And while in the interviews the women mentioned antagonism towards pronatalism and aspects of patriarchy, they all build their arguments on prospects of a better personal or common life. And so, the childfree women reject the main core aspect, a literal expression of the oppression, yet they don’t reject the entire symbolic pronatalist order. In such sense, seen from Edelman’s perspective, they are still participating in the economy of futurity (2004).

However again, since Edelman’s theorising rejects all possibility for change, he basically deems willingly resistant subject an oxymoron. For Edelman the opposite of future-children as an idea of the symbolic order is the death drive, which in itself is contra-productive as any production would one way or another benefit the current symbolic order (2004). So then, the women who
choose not to procreate and thus, as I suggest, take themselves out of the system, can’t really do both – be the queer subjects of the death drive and a resistant feminist subjects. A conscious reaction against, creates a direction. A move away, even without destination, is still a move towards. As Ahmed suggests, partly disagreeing with Edelman “[w]e have hope because what is behind us is also what allows other ways of gathering in time and space, of making lines that do not reproduce what we follow, but instead create new textures on the ground” (Ahmed 2006: 570). The author suggests transformatory value of queer, freed from the normative enslavement to the future child.

And even if we were to suppose for a moment that resistance is possible without imaginary of the alternative, Edelman offers “the act of resisting enslavement to the future, in the name of having a life” (2004: 30). It could certainly be said that while the ambitions of most my informants disqualify them from being Edelman’s queer subjects; the same ambitions vividly illustrate having a life. This is something to be said, seeing that one of the strongest desire, expressed by the childfree women I interviewed (as well as those presented in different other works, such as Peterson (2014) and Gillespie (2000)), is that for personal freedom and investment in one's happiness.

Hence, there are overlaps between Edelman’s queer and the women I interviewed, yet their juxtaposition is problematic. A real life impossibility of Edelman’s subject creates a gap between his described subject, and the flesh and blood women I interviewed. As I show throughout empirical part of my work, they exhibit affiliations with the norm: the women reject normativity only partially, don’t fully recognize oppression in a way that Edelman does, and express ambitions to better the future. However, as I argue presenting their rationale behind childfreedom, in an omnipresence of pronatalism, a purely non-normative position is impossible - it is inevitably stained with inner negotiations and internalisation.

While I see Edelman’s queer subject to be impossible in its entirety, it is indispensable in imagining the resistance. I thus turn to more tangible views of Foucault in search of reconciliation between Edelman’s resistant subject and my informants. Similarly to Edelman, Foucault rejects a grand narrative, however, he maintains hope in grassroots resistance, even marginal, bodily, deemed mad, or one that doesn’t define itself thusly (Pickett 1996; Foucault
1977). Foucault’s subject is in a humble, yet constant position to attain power, thus his works allows a clearer juxtaposition of childfreedom and resistance (Pickett 1996; Foucault 1982; Sawicki 1991). And while, according to Picket, Foucault rejects a unified idea of utopia, he does believe in “analysis, criticism, destruction, and overthrow of the power mechanisms” by means of localised grassroots struggles (Foucault in Pickett 1996: 463).

First of all, by refusing the bodily acts of pregnancy and birth, my informants engage in personal bodily resistance. According to Pickett, who analyses works of Foucault, “body itself is the object of power”, which can be legitimately deployed in a face of oppression, executed towards that body (1996: 460). In this sense childfree subjects, representing some of Edelman’s queerness, do “redefine such notions as ‘civil order’ through a rupturing of our foundational faith in the reproduction of futurity” (2004: 16).

However, as I have discussed in the last chapter of the empirical part of my work, not all of them see their actions thusly. Therefore, another aspect from the quotation above, that of foundational faith is important. Considering the invisibility of the pronatalist hegemony, internal experiences of a subject don’t automatically have an influence, and thus the most direct outward influence is offering an alternative imaginary. As discussed above, not a utopian grand narrative, but rather a vision of transgression which causes denaturalisation of the norm. This is created by my informants through open declarations of their childfreedom. As I have shown throughout the second empirical part of my thesis, and especially the part Articulation - difference between not having and not wanting children, open and unapologetic communication of one’s childfreedom is met with the heaviest counteractions exactly because it displaces a fraction of power, splintering the monolithic norm.

And so, pairing the rejection of Edelman’s described reproductive futurism with Foucault’s broader views of power and its transgression, I suggest, exposes two main aspects, qualifying childfreedom as resistance. Childfree women corporeally refuse the pronatalist norm, and by communicating their decision, they form an alternative imaginary, thus challenging the pronatalist norm.

However, as I have presented in the beginning of my analysis, I use Edelman’s insights to demonstrate a general system of pronatalism; and Irigaray’s works, together with other feminist
authors’, to zoom in on women’s instrumental role in it. I thus will continue my analysis by examining childfreedom in relation to specific aspects of women’s instrumentality, and explore in more detail what resisting concrete assigned roles means to childfree women and the system which assigns these roles.

Irigaray addresses resistance only fragmentally, yet she analyses oppression in a great detail from construction to methods of execution (1985; 1993). Using assertions in Women on the Market, childfreedom can be analysed as some level of liberation from the system in which women, defined through psychoanalytical lack, are employed in reproduction of the patriarchal system (Irigaray 1985). In the economy where identity is coerced to a woman through supposed lack, and the only offered cure is slavery to an external image of fulfilment, refusal of this image is a first step. As Irigaray suggest, using writings of Marx, a childfree woman equals a commodity taking itself out of the market - a skewed object with a sudden unexpected subjectivity “No doubt, ‘so far as it is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it.... But, so soon as [a wooden table, for example] steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent” (Irigaray 1985: 182 original addition). Irigaray continues her analysis by specifying that the reproduction happens through exchange of women by men, the obtained women then birthing (preferably male) offspring branded by the name of the father (ibid.). Childfree women don’t subscribe to said production, and thus, from this point of view, become free from the main enslaving labour. Using Irigaray’s metaphor, they become a skewed table, an oxymoronic entity.

An object refusing its purpose undoubtedly disrupts the system that produces it, but does it escape its commodity status? Or does it merely become spoilage?

How could material substance enjoy her/itself without provoking the consumer's anxiety over the disappearance of his nurturing ground? How could that exchange-which can in no way be defined in terms ‘proper’ to woman's desire appear as anything but a pure mirage, mere foolishness, all too readily obscured by a more sensible discourse and by a system of apparently more tangible values? (Irigaray 1985: 32)

Irigaray asks, noting that construction of the system of women’s oppression, while rationalised in psychoanalytical lack and desire to fulfil it, has many upholding aspects and mechanisms. The construction of a serving female encapsulates (self)control of one’s sexuality, looks, behaviour,
thinking and relatively all other aspects of her identity. And while the ultimate prescribed goal is correct reproduction, the connecting side-goals alone bear great importance. Looking back to the empirical part of my work, the delegitimization mechanisms, which the norm employs, exercised after the women had declared their childfreedom, clearly shows a refusal of the norm to acknowledge their subjectivity only based on their rejection of procreation. The women themselves might enjoy their new-found freedom, but the system still sees them as commodities, moreover - unruly, voluntarily spoiled thus infuriating the consumer and the whole system.

Irigaray, as well as feminists psychoanalysts, such as Mitchell (1975), extensively analyses women’s place, assigned through classical psychoanalysis (1985). Irigaray identifies three uses for women-commodities: the virgin, the mother and the prostitute (ibid.). They are all constructed in relation to their use for a man - the virgin being a symbol for the potential flesh, a high market value due to her mint condition; the mother is an already owned commodity, having lost her exchange value, but fulfilling her destiny; and finally the prostitute is a devalued good – un-owned and most directly instrumental - her value is based on her direct availability in the sexual market (ibid.).

The borders and transition between the virgin and the mother are much more fluid now, than they were traditionally, when women were bombastically transferred from one role to another through an almost magic penetrative touch of a penis. That being said, the three positions, while softened around the edges, remain. As feminist authors point out, nowadays we are even expected to combine them in performing to one man, yet the main role has to remain clear (Gillespie 2000; Federici 2012; etc.). A mother becomes a teasing teenage brat or a voluptuous prostitute for her husband (so he wouldn’t get bored and get an actual one), but the role has to be abandoned as soon as it is utilised for the purpose. A woman still submits to the rules of her position and accounts to the male reference point in her life.

A childfree woman doesn’t sit right in any of the described positions. She does not fulfil the status of a virgin (regardless of her sexual experiences) because a virgin is not a corporeal person, but an image of innocent, yet alluring and sensual future flesh (Irigaray 1985). A virgin’s essence is in her naivety and non-subjectivity, an offer for the maximum value (ibid.). A childfree (remembering the crucial aspect of voluntarism) is never a virgin as not only does she
not promise the future flesh, which justifies the whole sexual endeavour, *heterosexual alibi* as Edelman (2004) calls it; by doing so she breaks the semblance of a willing object.

Again, a position of a mother, while encompassing much more than the actual child-having - defined in relation to a man she is the home for his vitality and that of his children - is not a position for a childfree. Looking through a liberal feminist idea of choice she can strive for a position of a good woman by overcompensating through other normative aspects of femininity, as one of my informants listed: “body forms, being gentle, goodness, when a person radiates, peacefulness, this is femininity <...> not necessarily a child” (Lucy). This being said, in a normative view, the position cannot be fulfilled to its full and/or for long. And so, a childfree woman is in a non-existent place, a glitch in a system.

Since she doesn’t measure up, she is being aided back to the right path by the social pressure. And once it fails - she declares her voluntary intentions and thus subjectivity, which is by design only available to a man, the system becomes brutal in attempt to preserve itself. This brutality is clear from the interviews above as childfree women share the condemnation they receive.

The third available option, that of a prostitute, might be discursively most accurate. Even though a prostitute is still in use in the patriarchal sexual economy, out of the three, she has the most subjectivity. She does not belong to a father or a husband, and while she is still an object, her connection to the market is the most liberal, even somewhat voluntary. Not fully, as she doesn’t have a choice *out*, but she has some choice of *when*, *who* and *how much* as she is no more burdened with upholding the idea of virginity, nor does she belong to one owner.

Moreover, a prostitute is the only one whose pleasure is tolerated. Irigaray concludes her essay *The Sex Which is not One* “[n]either as mother nor as virgin nor as prostitute has woman any right to her own pleasure” (1985: 187) and I don’t object, however, the last of the three is condemned for her promiscuity, often seen by the society as overly sexual while tolerated by the value and use of the notion. Thus, pleasure doesn’t skew the norm of a prostitute. Gaining some subjectivity through deviance is what the category is about. In normative society it is assigned exactly to the women claiming their pleasure.

However, if we attempt to juxtaposition the symbolic categories according to their access to
pleasure, and through it - subjectivity, the position of a prostitute remains fully integrated in the exchange economy, where pleasure is awarded solely to men. She might be allowed and able to snatch shreds of it, but only as long as it is a by-product of serving her duty. The childfree on the other hand refuse the main aspect of altruistic/masochistic devotion and instead indulge in what otherwise is men’s entitlement - professional and political ambitions, personal freedom and unapologetic use of free choice. Thus, while in the symbolic order the childfree might be closer to the prostitute, the position doesn’t sit right. Prostitute’s subjectivity is limited and fragile - she still is a part of the economy, and is that through her deviance.

The deviance of the childfreedom, on the other hand, doesn’t fit into the normative system. It isn't so easily appropriated. The childfree don’t properly fulfil any of the available womanhood roles as they reject the core aspect of women’s instrumentality. The norm, struggling to sort real life women into symbolic roles fails, where the methods used are faced with legal rights of the subjects. The perpetual act of coercing genuine individuals into the symbolic lockers reaches its limits, and this borderland destination becomes a fragile space of antagonistic freedom for some.

The women engage in an immediate struggle against normative imaginaries, systematically imposed on them. Looking once again from a Foucauldian perspective, such is a most immediate struggle, seen positively by the author (Foucault 1982: 780-781). As Pickett summarises:

Any reasonable interpretation of Foucaultian resistance will necessarily have a large amount of indeterminacy. While it is non-hierarchical, concerned with memory and the body, and the negation of power while still potentially affirmative of something else, these various elements of resistance are compatible with a range of practical political engagements, such as broadly liberal or even anarchist positions. This is because Foucault cannot lay down how or why one should struggle. Such a globalistic theory would become one more agent of power (1996: 461)

Indeterminacy and direct, bodily objection of normative coercions are some of the clearest features of childfreedom. There are some discrepancies, disallowing complete positioning of empiric childfreedom as resistance and I will further address them in the next subchapter. However, Foucault’s broad conceptualization of resistance allows encompassing different theoretical angles, which I have used to analyse the relationship of pronatalist norm and childfreedom. A view of resistance as a constant, transformatory, yet not unambiguously positive or fatal for the power, expands Edelman’s concept of queer, and allows incorporation of complicated empirical ambiguities. Seeing through this broad prism, childfreedom is certainly a
form of resistance to the pronatalist norm.

Moreover, as I have continued my analysis with Irigaray’s more specific elaborations on women’s instrumentalities, I explored how the notion of resistance is upheld when examined in relation to different concrete oppressive constructions. By now examining childfreedom as resistance, I have explored its magnitude and meaning for the relationship between the norm and the deviance. I have shown through this chapter that childfree women don’t only reject the domination of the potential future child, by refusing to enable its physical embodiment, but by doing that, denaturalize the norm and breach the limits of concrete positions, assigned to women. Finally, I suggest that childfreedom is a form of resistance, yet not absolute and clear cut, and so I will devote the next sub-chapter to exploring its problematic and limitations.

**Out of the system? Limitations**

I argue in the last part, that by choosing to remain childfree, the women resist the pronatalist norm. A substantial part of the last subchapter is devoted to discussing the extent of childfreedom beyond just a bodily act. While the very act can rather easily be framed as resistance in a climate of compulsory motherhood, further aspects of childfreedom are debatable and more complicated. Willing imaginary of a utopian world is one crucial element, another – commitment to separate aspects of patriarchal system, and finally, failure to recognise or account for broader systematic influences, enforcing *reproductive futurism* (Edelman 2004). Having above demonstrated some ambiguities, constraining a view of childfreedom as indisputably resistant act, I will elaborate on them, together with other aspects, to explore the limitations.

Material feminists (Mitchell 1975; Federici 2012) explore intersections between the above mentioned aspects, concluding, as Irigaray and Edelman does, that labour other than mothering contributes to the upkeep of the system all the same. Juliet Mitchell suggests an articulated relationship between production and reproduction:

> [i]n analysing contemporary Western society we are (as elsewhere) dealing with two autonomous areas: the economic model of capitalism and the ideological model of patriarchy. The interdependence between them is found in particular expression of patriarchal ideology – in case the kinship system that defines patriarchy is forced into the straightjacket of nuclear family. But if we analyse the economic and the ideological situation only at the point of their interpenetration, we shall never see the means of their transformation. (Mitchell 1975: 412)
Mitchell connects psychoanalysis with Marxism, suggesting that analysis and transformation of both is the only way to end interlocking oppressions. Nuclear family is identified as the nodal point where the two axes meet and produce a unique enslaving interdependency between the members (ibid).

When I refer to the system or oppression, I am aware that my understanding of the meaning of these concepts is likely very different from that of my informants. A couple of women mentioned a word capitalism when describing the broadest object of resistance, however regardless of it, absolute majority of them, when talking about personal goals, benefits of childfreedom and their general attitudes, expressed what could be considered capitalist values; personal and economic freedom, mobility, career, etc. The lifestyle most of them are living is disconnected from class struggle and thus the interlocking oppressions, identified by Mitchell (1975). While the informants expressed their anger towards explicit oppression of women, they distinguished themselves from women, affected by it, by adding categories such as province and less educated to describe them.

Socialist authors elaborate on connection between patriarchy and capitalism. Federici, demanding for wages for housework in her famous article from 1975 sees all the unpaid feminine labour as crucial to women's and class oppression (2012). Just as Mitchell (1984) she separates production and reproduction - paid from unpaid labour. While the class aspect is relevant in a different way in a concrete case of my research - my informants are in a privileged position to the women Mitchell or Federici addresses, the attempt to bring entire femininity to light as labour for the system is significant.

A division between paid and unpaid labour, which might have been possible in the 70’s, but is very difficult today, when work is promoted as a merely slightly less glamorous part of an otherwise enchanting bucket-list for a modern woman. The redistribution of housework through new technologies, increased women’s employment and modernisation have merged the limits between paid, unpaid work and leisure; and thus have deemed feminine labour ever more invisible (Federici 2012: 96-112). Federici depicts mainly conditions of working class women. The experiences of educated, middle class, cosmopolitan women I interviewed are slightly different. Economic and social capital might allow them to benefit more from the mentioned
developments, thus leaving motherhood as the only clear inevitably feminine labour.

According to Mitchell, historically women were seen through motherhood and family as all the roles available to them referred to it (2004). While women have always worked and had same sex relations (not necessarily sexual), the roles they were defined through didn’t include these aspects of their lives:

[t]he family, housework and motherhood which were areas outside the domain of politics, hid women. Women’s other roles were invisible and remained untheorized. To be a woman could be only to be a mother and a daughter, whatever else a woman did, she did within the range of this framework. (Mitchell 2004: 422)

It is worth noting, that Mitchell’s ideas, like those of many other feminists of the second wave, rely heavily on the idea of global sisterhood, strongly criticized and contested by later authors. Nonetheless, while her point of different women’s roles is expressed as only visible for and among women, the underlying challenge to the mainstream discourse, historically seeing a woman only through maternal relations, remains valid.

Mitchell argues that with the concept of gender different identities came to be and the two pillars of materialist feminist analysis - reproduction and production - shifted respectively (2004). Shared roles in parenting and housework changed and childbearing remained the only static aspect, based in biological sex (ibid.). Mitchell refers to Firestone as she divorces the natural from the societal. And while author’s hopes that technological development would free women from sheer responsibility of childbearing seem futile (50 years later we are not much closer to accessible alternatives for women childbearing), her analysis of the natural is still relevant (Mitchell 1984). While some part of the reproductive affairs is inevitably based on biology and thus the natural, the whole concept of natural, the author argues - is socially constructed (ibid.). This very construct is to be challenged, claims Mitchell, if we are to address the pestilent intersection of capitalism and patriarchy (ibid.).

The author identifies three structures of women’s oppression and thus analysis: production, reproduction, sexuality and the socialisation of children, showing how their historical construction is understandable, but no current justification is possible (ibid.). Reproduction of children is addressed in relation to the paid labour, as, looking from a Marxist perspective, paid employment is a first step in uniting for ultimate liberation. The author positions naturalised
process of childbearing in a mechanism of women’s alienation from the struggle, and thus oppression: “maternity, family, absence from production and public life, sexual inequality” (ibid.).

While Mitchell sees the chain as connected in causation, if we look at it in a broader contemporary context, each aspect can be taken individually. With paid work seen as fostering individual identity, and romantic partnerships as a source of support rather than oppression, both aspects become invisible in a middle-upper class modern woman’s reflection of herself. What is left in her view is maternity and sexual inequality. Maternity, still imposed as natural and compulsory, connected to, and coerced through pronatalism, becomes not only most intensely visible source of oppression, but equated to it. Thus, considering temporal and class/social status positioning of my informants, Mitchell’s sequence gets unfortunately reduced to maternity equals sexual inequality.

Capitalism has been to a good extent able to appropriate aspects of women’s lives, resulting in soft perpetuation, invisibility of feminine labour as it is rebranded and eased for the middle and upper class women. The privileges these women are enjoying, as can be seen from fragments of the interviews - counter positioning themselves with younger generation and province women in regard to poorer options and abilities to choose. Position of my informants allows most of them to largely ignore problematics of housework, partner control, hardships of paid labour, or hardships of not having access to one. They embody the modern liberal woman - sharing housework with their also modern (and not always male and/or not always monogamous) partner(s), often happily employed as their work isn’t burdensome labour. They don’t accentuate or even mention other marks of oppression as they are either non-existent for them or appropriated by capitalism so that they appear to be a part of neoliberal have it all identity of a modern woman. Wittingly or not, they enjoy the benefits of the system. Giving birth, as Mitchell rightly notices, is the only fundamentally immutable component of womanhood (1984), which is consequently being rejected. Not only that, it is being rejected, as the informants disclose, largely to give place for other components to flourish.

\[17\] Definitions of a word *family* can differ, but Mitchell is concerned with nuclear family when she uses the word. My informants don’t have children and some of them aren’t married with their partners, eliminating some of the oppressive features of the institution, I thus choose to use a more neutral word - partnership to describe their relationships.
Class struggle not being relevant to most of my informants due to the earlier mentioned privileged position might contribute to their understanding of motherhood as an isolated oppression. The viewpoint, shared by most women I interviewed, leads to liberal feminist attitude where the totality of women’s current situation is ignored for the price of single issue recognition. Nancy Fraser identifies such view to be a problem of entire modern feminism, she writes “instead of arriving at a broader, richer paradigm that could encompass both redistribution and recognition, second-wave feminists effectively traded one truncated paradigm for the other” (Fraser 2009: 108). Fraser grieves feminist attempts for systematic change, lost in the process of neoliberal appropriation and translated into identity recognition instead (ibid.). Using this paradigm, I can regret that childfreedom as it is enacted and seen by my informants, becomes a Federician dystopia. Demanding for recognition as equal subjects without further rejection of the system, which deprives women of the very subjectivity we assume to have.

While Federici and Irigaray might argue about the most desirable utopia, both authors agree in addressing the totality of the intersecting oppressions constituting the system as a whole: “you work, not because you like it, or because it comes naturally to you, but because it is the only condition under which you are allowed to live” (Federici 2012: 18). Here Federici and the whole movement Wages for Housework fits with Edelman as they expand my previously suggested idea of denaturalisation through the act of refusal (ibid. 2012). Author equates naturalisation of reproduction to its devaluation and thus devaluation of women’s position in a society. She thus suggests that “the value of labour is proven and perhaps created by its refusal” (2012: 96). Author’s goal isn’t wages for, but against housework - denaturalizing femininity is just a step in an ultimate fight against capitalist patriarchy.

Nonetheless, as I hint throughout my work, and assert in this last subchapter, the privileged position of my informants, together with their rejection being confined to mostly bodily act, hinders the magnitude of influence of their childfreedom. In most cases my informants see and enact their childfreedom as a digression rather than a (non)identity of rejection, or a full (attempt to) exit the system of oppression. This isolation of childfreedom as an act of resistance, I suggest, is a locus of its limitations. What becomes of rejection of the future child, by refusal of enabling its physical embodiment, if the act is separated from (or limited to partial) broader rejection of
symbolic futurism?

My interviewed childfree women live what could be superficially seen as epitomized embodiment of Edelman’s queer - most of them invest in themselves and the now, live out their desires and reject some limitations and norms of society (2004). While doing so, however, they dissociate from the death drive ridden subject of anti-futurity. They express concerns and hopes for the future as well as ambitions to make an impact to bettering it. It could be argued that their testimonies are contaminated with their wish to present themselves in a way which is acceptable and/or a way they are conditioned to, and partially that might be true. However, their social status, lifestyles and other more tangible aspects support my initial suggestion.

And so, taken away from the wholeness of futurity rejection, motherhood is rejected as an isolated oppression. Consequently, the aspects that are left resemble rather hedonistic embrace of the childfreedom rather than a full-scope resistance to the normative system. As a result of which, they are left with freedom to invest into improvement of lives and individual positions (which, should be noted, by itself can be a good or at least a neutral thing), leading to exploring/bettering/fostering other system-furthering aspects of life and womanhood, such as career, unpaid labour, quality romantic relationships and consumerism.

Conclusion

I have started my work from exposing my own position and experience as a childfree woman and built it onwards. Having myself gone through inner dialogues as well as social clashes surrounding my decision to not have children, I condensed the questions I wanted to explore into a questionnaire for childfree women. The search for informants through different mediums exposed some limitations as well as had influence on determining the direction of my work. At an early stage it was clear that addressing class diversity in my empirical part isn’t going to be possible as relatively all the women, who responded to my search were well educated, financially secure and currently living in big cities. Having conducted and analysed the interviews I present them in my work. I attempted to present my informant’s experiences in a direct and at times unmediated manner, at the same time extracting recurrent tendencies, views and points for analysis. As no empirical research voicing experiences and thoughts of childfree women has
been done so far in Lithuania\textsuperscript{18}, recording the unique testimonies of childfree women was an important side-goal of my work.

After having set the personal, theoretical and methodological grounds, in the first part of my analysis, I explored the construction of a future mother. Through memories of my informants I have showed how girls are being prepared to be mothers through various expressions of hegemonic womanhood. I have demonstrated the pronatalist norm by showing how motherhood is presented as a future fact, not an option; and how pronatalist pressure is executed through relatively all social connections in women’s lives. The first discontent with the idea of motherhood, considerations and taking the decision to remain childfree, follows. Through that I show the difficulty to exit the pronatalist norm.

Having explored the decision-taking, I made a distinction at a turning point of articulation. A moment of \textit{coming out} as childfree, making the perceived deviance visible, exposed to contestation and condemnation by the surroundings. I here have emphasized the difference between not having, and not wanting children as a crucial point in the thesis, a turning point determining the relationship between childfree subjects and the norm they both inhabit and resist. I have claimed that openly declaring childfreedom destroys the invisibility of the norm and positions women in direct antagonism.

Hereon I have presented the reasons my informants name for their choice of childfreedom and shortly discuss limitations and implications of the presented views. I argue that important as they are, the reasons cannot be seen without considering the hostile pronatalist context they have been developed in. This very context is explored as I continue to the last theme of the first part - the attempts, made by the norm, to delegitimize childfree women. Through fractions of interviews I demonstrate how the pronatal hegemony is challenged, and attempts to protect and consolidate itself by pressuring deviant subjects back to the normative line, and delegitimizing them once the effort has failed. I finish the first part by concluding that pronatalism is an inherent norm in our society, and it transforms from latent to openly aggressive, when threatened by the voluntarism of childfreedom. A woman is constructed by society to be a mother more than anything else, and

\textsuperscript{18} Except the master thesis of Leonavičiūtė (2012)
her refusal to fulfil this expectation disturbs as well as challenges the normative social order.

In the second part of my work I have focused on the childfree women’s views. I first have explored my informants’ childfreedom from their own perspectives. I have shown how they construct their agency and the view of the self and how they position themselves in the normative society. Relations to womanhood, personal freedom and the body have been explored, revealing conflicting views on the norm, and segmented constructions of femininity. Personal freedom as well as changed outlooks have appeared to be the main positive features of childfreedom.

The outer politicised connections were explored, as I have continued to present my informant’s views on the transformatory potential of their actions. I have presented their views on how society and the norm are affected by their childfreedom, along with their political ambitions and personal hopes. I have finalised the section by showing that the women are somewhat reluctant to acknowledge resistant features of their actions. However, they do identify different socio-political evils and assert their resistance to be instrumental in furthering them.

In the last section of my work I have analysed childfreedom and my empirical findings theoretically. I have used my initial theoretical standpoint to explore broader meaning of childfreedom and answer my research question. Through analyses of authors such as Edelman and Irigaray, I have shown how childfreedom can be seen as an act of resistance. The complications, presented by different views of the authors I used, were connected by Foucault’s wide view of power and resistance, which I share. I have continued by addressing the limitations of childfreedom as resistant act. Through the use of materialist feminist authors, I have elaborated on the privileged position of my informants. I have showed that only partial dissociation from the norm, and attempts to further non motherhood-related normative life goals, limits the resistant qualities of my informant’s childfreedom.

The conclusion to my work is twofold. On one hand, pronatalism and women's oppression are the norm, integral to our society. Thus, childfreedom, as a voluntary act of refusal, is automatically an act of resistance to the normative system. On an individual level this resistance delivers liberation. My research showed that freedom to pursue personal goals, changed outlooks and overall emancipation was reached by my informants as a result of childfreedom.
Furthermore, seen from a broader perspective, childfreedom is important in presenting a different social image of a woman and thus challenging the norm. Openly childfree women pioneer in transgressing the limits of the norm and creating a different social imaginary, in which motherhood is presented as an option, and not a compulsion. This notion denaturalizes motherhood as a must for women, and thus broadens the limits of contemporary womanhood.

On the other hand, analysing women’s oppression from a broader perspective, limitations to transformatory potential of the childfreedom became painfully clear. First of all, the personal liberation achieved through childfreedom appeared to be to some extend preconditioned by the privileged position of my informants. While childfreedom wasn’t an easy position to take, it was possible. As subjects of resistance my informants are not the subjects affected most severely by the oppression they resist. Furthermore, considering manifold nature of oppression, resistance to only one expression of it, merely tweaks the norm. Such is the case of my informants, who support the overall oppression by investing in it the freedoms, gained through resistance to a part of it. In other words, the main limitation to resistant effect of childfreedom is seeing it in an individualistic view, and failure to address the totality of oppression, thus unwittingly supporting it. As a result, the resistance is appropriated into identity politics of liberal economy, which, I suggest, in a big picture, doesn’t significantly challenge the overreaching oppression.

Finally, as the phenomenon of childfreedom is relatively unknown and thus unexplored in Lithuania, my work only touched a small fraction of it. Further research, involving a broader spectrum of informants from different socioeconomic positions, should be done for better understanding of resistant qualities of childfreedom. However, as I have argued in my work, such aim isn’t easy to reach due to prevalence of the pronatalist norm and the stigmatization of childfreedom. I thus wish for a simultaneous process of increase in childfreedom, and research on it, to happen, so that motherhood would eventually become a choice.
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Can childfreedom be seen as an act of resistance? An analysis of its effects on individual identity and the norm.

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Abstract
This thesis explores untheorized themes of pronatalism and childfreedom in Lithuania. Through an analysis of interviews of childfree women, I show the prevalence of a pronatalist norm in Lithuanian society, and how it’s challenged by the phenomenon of childfreedom. I examine women’s paths to childfreedom, the normative pressure they experience, and their views of their position. Pronatalist pressure transforms, when challenged by childfreedom, and especially when it is openly declared. I show that pronatalism is not easily challenged and childfreedom impacts both - the norm and the women, transgressing it. I argue that childfreedom can be seen as an act of resistance to the pronatalist norm, yet this view is restricted by significant limitations.

Keywords
Pronatalism, normativity, childfreedom, resistance, women, queer