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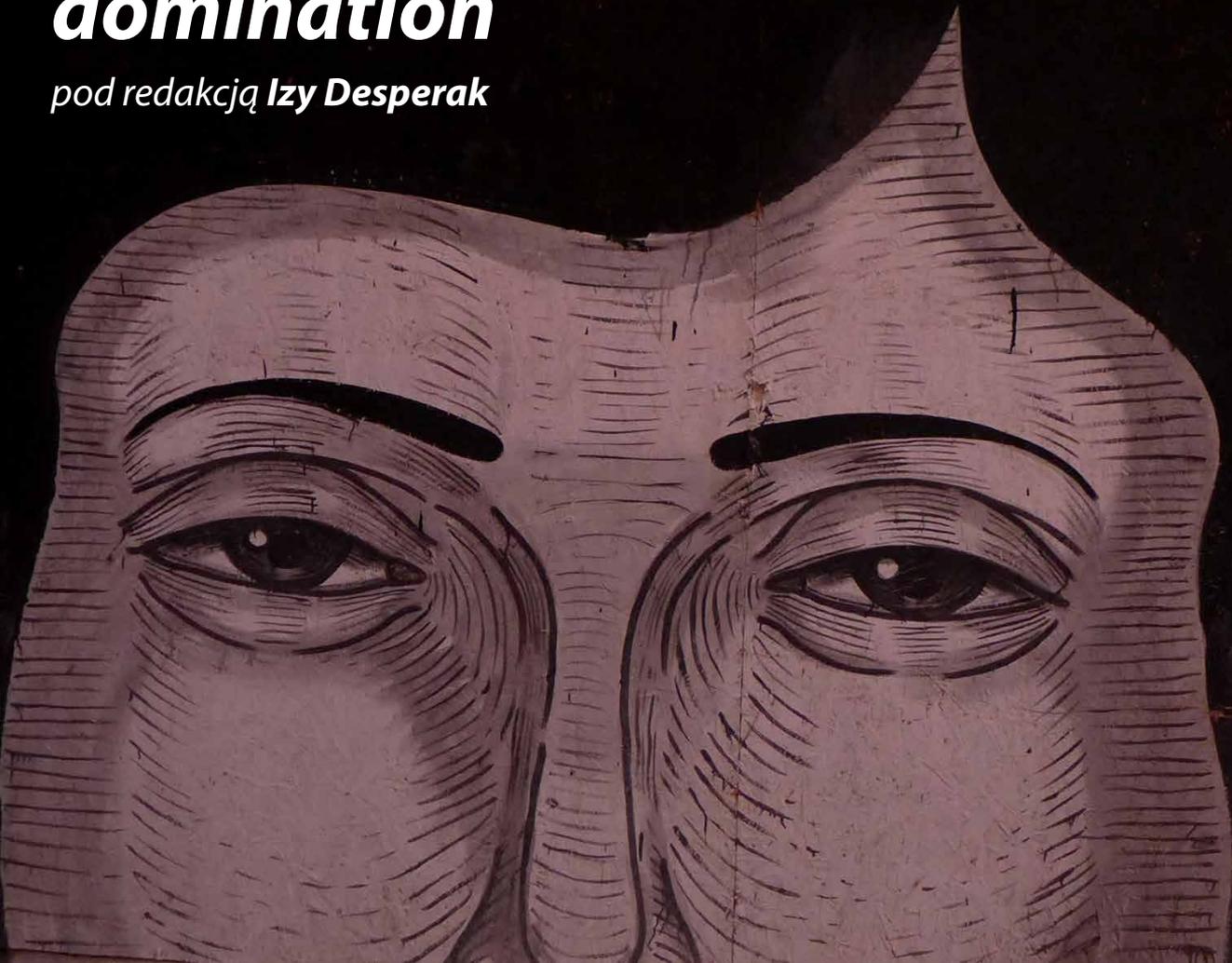
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władza sądzenia

***Feminism against
oppression and
domination***

pod redakcją Izy Desperak





Feminism against oppression and domination

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UNIVERSITY OF LODZ

introduction

This issue of our journal presents articles based on chosen papers given during conference “Women against domination and oppression”, held at University of Lodz in October 2017, organized by Interdisciplinary Gender Seminar, part of Center of Social Innovations. It was the first international conference, organized by the Seminar, and its results are being published both in a book “Kobiety wobec dominacji i opresji”, presenting articles in Polish, and in this issue of Power of Judgement, published in English. Interdisciplinary Gender Seminar gathers several academics representing various fields and institutions, the conference and both publications were prepared by the team made by Iza Desperak, Ewa Hyży, Inga B. Kuźma, Edyta Pietrzak and Dagmara Rode.

“Feminism against oppression and domination” issue is devoted to gender, especially women’s struggles with various forms of oppression and domination they still have to face up in contemporary world. Although the articles cover variety of topics, and their authors do represent diversity of academic fields and theoretical approaches, its dominant pattern is feminist perspective. The authors come from various contexts and describe problems observed in different countries. The analyses presented here regard new Polish movement of Black Protests, challenges of cross-discrimination in formal education and dilemmas of gender studies programmes.

As gender studies are under ideological threats in Hungary and Poland, we decided to ask the experts from both countries about their views on the problem [see the interview]. The European context of cotemporary debates is represented by analysis of certain Twitter “discussion” around Italian popular TV show, the global perspective is brought by analysis of Moroccan segregation in public space, still observed in the cafes, and the study on objectification of Chinese women based on literature analysis. The studies of mass media, Twittersphere or literature are accompanied by phenomenon of feminist cinema, thanks to the article on Agnes Varda works.

We decided to publish reviews of books recently published in Poland, addressing similar issues. Some of them should be popularised firstly among Polish readers – as they correspond to topics that are under-represented, as the study on “silver taboo” by Monika Kamieńska, analysis of biographical experience of women facing domestic violence, researched in certain local institution, by Katarzyna Gajek or analysis of Polish Black Protests by Ewa Majewska. As books by Maciej Duda and Renata Ziemińska are being vividly reviewed and discussed in Polish, we decided to publish the reviews only in English language. 🗨️

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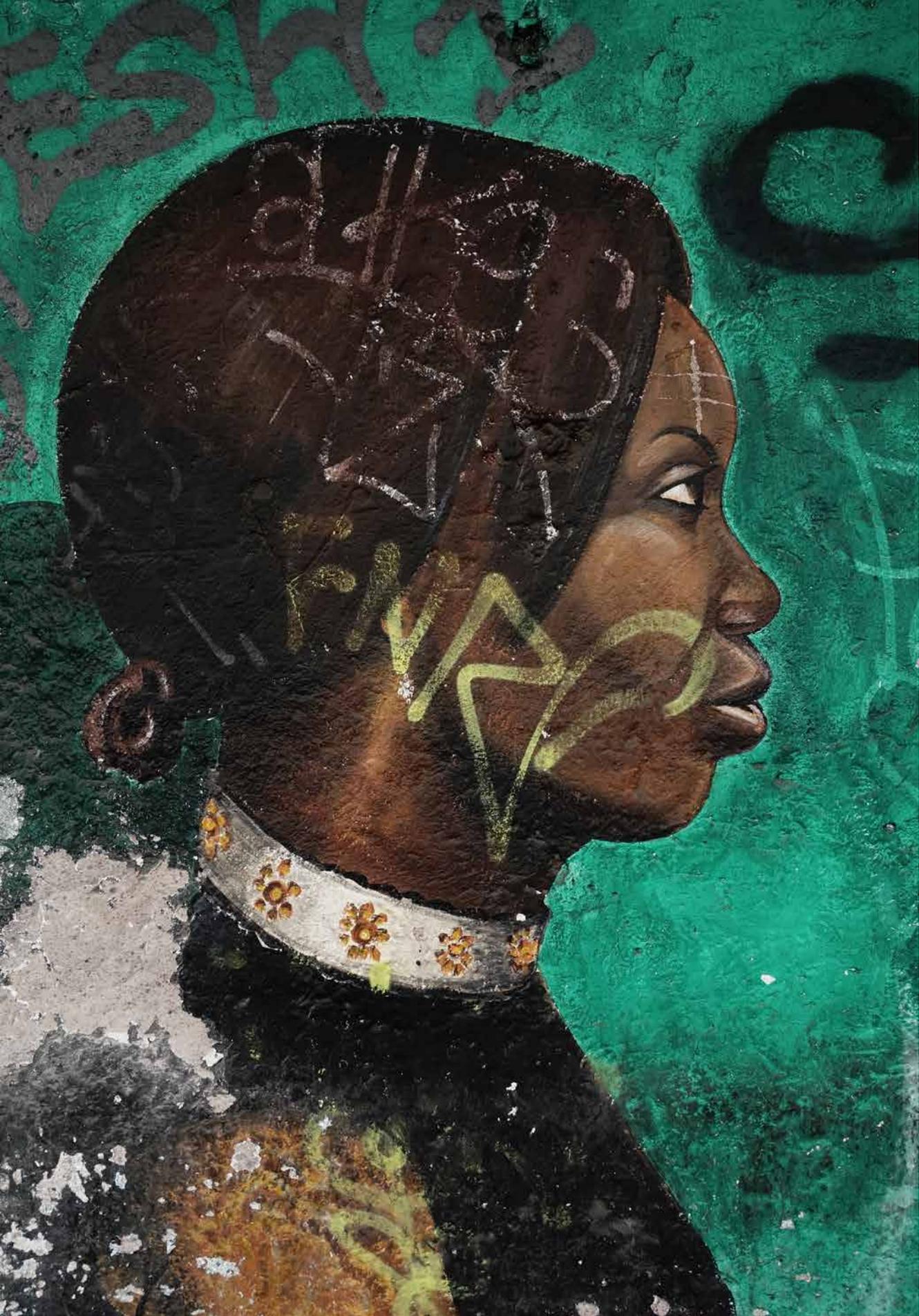
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Interview with Andrea Pető

Gender studies appeared in Central European countries together with democratic transition. First Polish programme was started (under the title of women's studies) in 1992, at University of Lodz, and is still continued here. Although gender studies gained a lot of interest among the students, they were never fully-fledged part of public university programmes. Since the beginning of 'war against gender' they found themselves under ideological attacks, we still experience. That is why we decided to ask Andrea Pető, our colleague and Professor in the Department of Gender Studies at Central European University, formerly in Budapest, about position of gender studies in Hungary. Both countries are often compared because of similar political threats and both countries experience attacks on gender studies.

Power of Judgment: How and when gender studies where started in Hungary, what role they played and how were they organized?

Andrea Pető: JiřinaŠmejkalová argued that feminism entered Eastern Europe with the "wrong passport," and explained its relative unsuccessfulness with this fact. After 1989 the higher education system in former communist countries has changed profoundly. The state opened up to different academic approaches, in the meantime the logic of selection changed from political meritocracy to financial elitism. Gender studies benefited from this new openness and gained backing, although

sometimes it lost in institutional competition for financial support.

In Hungary three factors contributed to the [institutionalization of gender studies](#). The first was research on social inequalities and women's employment. This was the pioneering area in which researchers could cooperate with colleagues from beyond the Iron Curtain as early as the beginning of the 1980's. (This beginning proved to be a fatal embrace, however, as the joint research on general issues such as social policies, poverty and inequality currently glosses over gender differences.) Thus it was no accident that in Hungary the first Women's Studies Center was established at the Marx Károly University of Economy (as it used to be called), as this was the institution in which research projects examining women's employment and social stratification were conducted. The second step is the inclusion of gender studies approaches in traditional disciplines of humanities such as history, literary studies or linguistics. Since in post-socialist countries most feminists were academics, highly trained and multilingual woman intellectuals who have engaged in dialogues with scholarship in countries beyond the Iron Curtain, they began to integrate gender studies into the institutions of higher education early on. This was the second factor contributing to the institutionalization of gender studies: feminist literary studies and linguistics as well as English and American studies departments played key roles in this development in Budapest, Szeged, Pécs, Miskolc, Debrecen,

because it was relatively easy for them to build gender-related approaches and works into their curricula and even their degree modules. The fact, that gender studies was mostly embedded in the humanities and less in the social sciences contributed to the “cultural turn” in Eastern European gender studies. The third factor was women’s NGOs in close connection with societal stakeholders. Gender studies has always developed in close connection with the society it was part of, mutually responding and shaping each others’ intellectual climate. In case of Hungary this collaboration was missing.

The Budapest based Central European University (CEU) was where the first one year MA program accredited by the State of New York started in 1996, followed by two year MA programs accredited by the Hungarian State and a PhD Program accredited by the State of New York, and awarded its two year master’s program in English with Hungarian accreditation by the Hungarian Accreditation committee in 2006. So if you look at the chronology of what’s happened in Hungary, you see that the masters’ programme in Gender Studies in Hungarian, which is offered by EötvösLoránd University (ELTE), which is the main university in Budapest, was the first target of political attacks. So initially, it was not CEU but the Gender Studies programme at ELTE that was a subject of vicious attacks in Spring 2017. So it happened through a [general attack](#) on Gender Studies that the Gender Studies programme at CEU became the [next target](#). But if you look at the public discussion, it turns out that nearly everybody has an idea and an opinion on what Gender Studies should be: on what should be taught, what the learning outcomes are, etc.

Power of Judgment: What happened later? What was the background for re-establishing? Closing? Forbidding gender studies?

How would you name the process that lead to disappearing of gender studies in Hungary?

Andrea Pető: Gender Studies will not disappear. On 16th November an active strike was organized by ELTE, CEU and Corvinus University. That means that faculty protested against banning gender studies from the accredited study lists. Colleagues who previously were silently sabotaging gender studies now included gender in the courses they are teaching and that was how they protested against the government. Gender studies become cool. My biggest fear is that colleagues are interiorizing helplessness and they are tired, worn out and depressed. This is how the [polypore state works](#). The polypore state is working strongly with the concept of security and of securitising all possible aspects of life. It is working with the concept of creating and mirroring existing institutions: and I already mentioned the polypore academia. And it is working also with the ideology of familialism. This means that policy is targeting not individuals, but families. So if you look at the CEDAW reports of Hungary or Poland, you see that they are basically replacing the concept of women with the concept of family. So women as independent agents are slowly disappearing from policy documents, and what remains is the concept of family. So, in this context, if you want to understand what happened with CEU and Gender Studies programmes, you see that Gender Studies was first a target and then CEU as an institution became the target with LexCEU. At the moment we are experiencing a socialisational fight in the Gramscian sense about values and power relations and it is the field of science where this is happening. 👁

Andrea Pető is Professor in the Department of Gender Studies at Central European University, Budapest, Hungary and a Doctor of Science of the

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Strong, Independent Women Who Know Their Worth and Shrug at the Very Idea of Discrimination. The Black Protest in the Context of Changing Ideals of Femininity in Poland

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UNIVERSITY OF WROCLAW

Abstract

This article is a critical analysis of the rhetoric of a successful mass mobilization against the proposed total ban on abortion in Poland, focusing on the Black Protest initiated in social media in September 2016 and resulting in the All-Poland's Women Strike which took place on the October 3rd, 2016. I argue with the dominant feminist narrative of the Black Protest, which conceptualizes it as a radical transformation of public debate and civil society in Poland as well as a clear manifestation of changing identities and attitudes towards the political among the so-called "ordinary women". Instead of story of change, I propose narrative of continuity, arguing that 2016 women's mobilization was successful and mobilized so many different women because it was rooted in well-known neoliberal discourse and traditional social genotypes of femininity, such as the Polish Mother and the indispensable family life manager.

Keywords:

social mobilization, Women's Strike, abortion, feminism, Poland, the Polish Mother, reproductive rights.

“On September 21st, 2016, feminism in Poland just began” (Majewska, 2017, p. 25) – Ewa Majewska, a feminist philosopher and activist writes. That day #Blackprotest started conquering the Internet. Its great popularity was followed by October 3rd, gathering hundreds of thousands women on the streets all over the country, protesting against the government plan for a ban on abortion.

The Black Monday, called also the All Poland’s Women Strike, turned out to be an unexpected success. It was the biggest street demonstration for decades: despite pouring rain there were more than 140 demonstrations all over the country (including small towns and villages), in which hundreds of thousands of people took part¹. Many of the protesters and organizers did not belong to the middle class, did not identify themselves as feminists and did not have any previous activist experience. Demonstrations on the streets were preceded by massive networking and mobilization in social media.

The Black Protest² was triggered directly by a proposal of a bill restricting Poland’s already restrictive abortion legislation. In April 2016 the anti-choice network “Stop Abortion”, focused around conservative organization *Ordo Iuris* and supported by the Roman Catholic Church, launched the campaign for a total ban on abortion and initiated gathering signatures

supporting the proposal. As a response, women started organizing themselves in social media and several demonstrations were held. Coat hanger was used as a symbol of dangerous self-induced or back-alley abortions that women are forced to perform when deprived of their basic reproductive rights. In the Summer the “Save the Women” Civic Committee succeeded in gathering signatures for an alternative citizens’ bill liberalizing the anti-abortion legislation. In September, this pro-choice proposal was rejected by the Parliament, whereas the abortion ban passed onto the second round of the legislative process. “Stop Abortion” project included a total ban on abortion as well as the threat of prosecution for not only doctors but also women.

Abortion in Poland is already permissible only under certain circumstances: when pregnancy results from a criminal act, when it poses a threat to the woman’s life or health, or if the fetus is irreparably damaged (*Abortion Policies: A Global Review*, 2002). New law was meant to erase all three exceptions. Although “the proposal stipulated that the prosecutor can drop charges under extraordinary circumstances, e.g. if the pregnancy was terminated to save the life of a woman” (Korolczuk, 2016, p. 93), there was the risk that even in such cases doctors would desist from performing abortions for fear of legal consequences. Moreover, according to some experts, there was a very real chance that women would be punished even after miscarriages (Korolczuk, 2016, p. 93).

As a result of the Black Protest, the Parliament has made a u-turn from the proposal of penalization of pregnancy termination. Not only protesters, dressed in black and filled with strong emotions, felt like revolution was in the air. Enthusiasm and sense of historical moment poured out from the headlines of the most influential liberal media: “The women’s strike is changing history

[...]” (mo, 2016), “So now there is a revolution. Black Monday is the beginning of a new era” (As, 2016)³, “Umbrella revolution, revolution of ordinary Polish women”⁴ (Faceci w czerni z “Gazety Wyborczej”, 2016).

Among feminist academics and activists enthusiasm and sense of historical moment have not faded away. 2016 women’s mobilization evoked heated debate that soon turned out to be an unanimous story of change. The Black Protest has been conceptualized as a breakthrough in Polish civil society, revolution, transformation of the common⁵ and even beginning of feminism in Poland. It has been also perceived as “awakening of Polish women” – a clear manifestation of changing identities and attitudes towards the political among so-called “ordinary women”. In this article I would like to present a different narrative on the 2016 women’s mobilization against abortion ban. I am convinced that the dominant narrative of change, when it comes to explaining factors of its success, is incomplete. By analysis of the Black Protest, its discursive representations, slogans and iconography that appeared at the demonstrations and discussions in social media I would like to argue that the Black Protest was successful and mobilized so many different women also because it refers to well-known neoliberal discourse and deep-rooted models of femininity. Instead

of narrative of change, I would like to tell the story of continuity.

Strong, independent women, who shrug at the very idea of “discrimination”

Agnieszka Graff, a Polish well-known feminist author, having written in 2003 about identity of Polish feminism, mentioned a few reasons behind a weak women’s movement in Poland. One of them was the conviction that “this is a land of strong, independent women – post-feminists of sorts – who know their worth and shrug at the very idea of ‘discrimination’” (2003, p. 104). I would like to argue, that the Black Protest, hailing the feminist awakening of Polish women, was successful paradoxically because it was based on this narrative.

The belief that Poland “is a land of strong, independent women – postfeminists of sorts – who know their worth and shrug at the very idea of ‘discrimination’” echoes deep-rooted models of Polish femininity: the Polish Mother and indispensable family life manager, as its later version⁶. The myth of the Polish Mother emerged in the 19th century, in times of foreign occupation, when Poland was wiped off the map of Europe. Many authors emphasize its immanent ambivalence. On the one hand, according to this myth, women were supposed to self-sacrifice and subordinate their needs and aspirations to the needs of family and the nation, but on the other hand, they could successfully complete many responsible tasks (even those traditionally seen as masculine) and might have expected great symbolic gratification and social prestige. Since families were “the only sphere where national identity, culture and language could be preserved”

1 According to police statement, there were 143 street demonstrations connected with the Black Protest, in which participated 98 thousand people (WP Wiadomości, 2016). According to the calculations of party Razem (Together), one of the organizers of the protests, the number of participants adds up to 162 thousand (Razem, 2016). Additionally, several support demonstrations were organized abroad.

2 In this article the term “Black Protest” is used in a generic sense, referring to both events from October 3th (the All Poland’s Women Strike) and social media campaigns against plan for abortion ban. I decided to follow the most common way of referring to 2016 women’s mobilization in Poland, popularized by its participants and media.

3 The title is quoted from Edwin Bendyk.

4 In Polish the sentence rhymes and has a form of a slogan. On October 3rd it was raining and most protesters had umbrellas; bird’s eye photos popularized in media picture a huge number of unfolded umbrellas over the crowd of people. Umbrella became a symbol of the Black Protest.

5 Transformation of the common is seen as a result of the Black Protest by Ewa Majewska. Drawing this idea, Majewska refers to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, whose notion of the common includes “not only the earth we share but also the languages we create, the social practices we establish, the modes of sociality that define our relationships” (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p. 139).

6 For the analysis of changing ideals of Polish femininity see: Titkow, 2007, pp. 47–73, Frąckowiak-Sochańska, 2009, pp. 79–110.

(Reimann, 2016, p. 222), women became both biological and symbolical bearers of national identity, heroines “who carried the future of the nation on their shoulders” (Reimann, 2016, p. 222). Motherhood gained great political significance.

“The managerial matriarchy”, created in Poland under communism, was a continuation of the Polish Mother myth (Titkow, 2007, pp. 63–70, Frąckowiak-Sochańska, 2009, pp. 85–93). As Anna Titkow, sociologist, writes, women gained feeling of being indispensable and appreciated manager of family life. Their professional activation turned out to be only another task, another social expectation to meet and has not changed gender relations and “social genotype” of Polish women, as Titkow calls it. As Maria Reimann aptly sums up, during the communist era the Polish Mother was still the ideal of femininity: “a strong woman who could do it all: work hard for her socialist fatherland and then come home to take care of the husband and children”, “[...] never complaining or expecting a reward, except for feeling absolutely indispensable” (2016, p. 222).

In the above description resemblance between traditional ideals of Polish femininity and “strong, independent women – post-feminist of sorts – who shrug at the very idea of ‘discrimination’” is evident. Titkow and Sochańska-Frąckowiak directly connect social genotype of Polish women with a Western postfeminist ideal of Superwoman: a multi-tasking wife and mother, successful businesswoman, who struggles to “have it all” (Titkow, 2007, p. 69, Frąckowiak-Sochańska, 2009, p. 93–99). What they share is rejection of the idea of patriarchal oppression and any systemic inequalities, strength and independence (also from the state institutions), resourcefulness and multitasking (by which I mean playing a number of different social roles at once).

After transformation of 1989 in Poland, it was easy to adopt neoliberal, individualistic and consumptional values, typical of Western postfeminism. According to Mira Marody and Anna Giza-Poleszczuk Poland’s political transformation, changes in labour market, opening up of the market for consumption goods and new lifestyles resulted in incorporation of neoliberal, individualistic discourse (2000, p. 165). Postfeminist ideas were welcomed and imported very quickly unlike ideas of women’s rights and women’s movement fighting for them. As a result, in the context of post-transformational Poland we can talk about discursive representations of Polish women as “postfeminists of sorts”, before any visible manifestations and real political successes of Polish feminist movement occurred.

As Frąckowiak-Sochańska indicates, transformation of 1989 has not replaced social demands from women, but broadened their range: by introducing culture of therapy, forced personal development, hyperconsumption, hypersexuality, and sexual attractiveness (2009, pp. 95–96). The social genotype has not changed: both traditional Polish Mother or indispensable family life manager and post-feminist Superwoman refer to a strong, multi-tasking and resourceful individual, who can meet the most demanding social expectations and “shrug at the very idea of ‘discrimination’”. Such a narrative, as one of the most prevalent conception of changing ideals of femininity in Poland, is a story of continuity; a story that tells that there is a stable core of identity of Polish women and its changes are superficial.

Coexistence of postfeminist tendencies and restricted women’s rights in post-transformational Poland can be described by the category of “triple entanglement” introduced by Samuel Nowak, one of the few Polish authors, who attempted to provincialize postfeminism (Nowak, 2011, pp. 211–232). His idea is a local travesty of “double entanglement” defined by

Angela McRobbie in her influential essay *Post-feminism and Popular Culture. Bridget Jones and the New Gender Regime*:

Double entanglement comprises the co-existence of neoconservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life [...] with processes of liberalization in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations [...]. It also encompasses the existence of feminism as at some level transformed into a form of Gramscian common sense, while also fiercely repudiated, indeed almost hated (McRobbie, 2009, p. 12).

According to Nowak, triple entanglement, Polish version of McRobbie’s concept,

refers to a situation in which society has not incorporated accomplishments of the second-wave feminism yet, although ideas typical of postfeminism have been already implemented, both at the level of academic theory and everyday social practices as well as cultural texts (books, TV series, movies etc.). In other words, it means that while women’s rights are still a contentious issue at the institutional and legislative level, popular culture, for example – although it remains to much extent conservative – is not an ideological monolith (2011, p. 216).

As a result, Polish women can be represented as “strong, independent and knowing their worth”, in a word: embodying postfeminist ideal of femininity, and reject the idea of systemic patriarchal oppression, popularized by second-wave feminism.

The two contradictory tendencies (slow implementation of the second wave achievements and fast importation of lifestyles and modes of consumption typical of postfeminism) intersect with the third one: resistance towards modernization, which results in

a conservative version of the latter. According to Nowak, “conservative modernization”, perceived as “a Polish specificity of local discourse”,

[...] made it possible for new qualities and perspectives referring to gender and sexuality politics to emerge, privileging at the same time the status quo. Thus, conservative modernization comprises series of processes, related to implementation of modern governance and technologies (in Poland it means transformation to capitalist economy), but not accompanied by deep changes of traditional social structures. In this approach market is not a vehicle for social change, but rather a tool for preservation of the existing ideological system (Nowak, 2011, p. 216).

In my conviction the category of conservative modernization could be applied also to the shape of civil society in Poland. Many authors describe it as a paradoxical mixture of tendencies coming from different historical and political contexts. As Kerstin Jacobsson, political sociologist, argues, in contemporary Polish civil society “some traditions of the pre-socialist time, such as entrepreneurialism, and some legacies of the socialist time, most importantly the lack of generalized trust, fit well and are reinforced by the current neoliberal ideology” (2017, p. 83). Different influences mix and form “the paradoxical combination of individual initiative and resourcefulness, and [...] lack of classical civic virtues, or [...] the inclination to pursue collective aims in individualist and privatist forms” (Jacobsson, 2017, p. 82).

In the prevalent narrative of change, the Black Protest is said to break with conservative modernization. The so-called “revolution of ordinary women”, based on solidarity and sisterhood, rather than individual initiative and resourcefulness, is seen as a manifestation of transformation of civil society. Conceptualized

as grassroots, decentralized and non-hierarchical mobilization it is far from neoliberalized and professionalized action frames, available only for the privileged, typical of civil society in Poland. It is also said to reflect change of models of femininity, since women, protesting on the streets all over the country in pouring rain, cannot identify themselves as those who “shrug at the very idea of ‘discrimination’”.

Such an interpretation is based on contestation of the story of continuity of social genotype of Polish women, growing especially among sociologists. Renata Hryciuk and Elżbieta Korolczuk, editors of the book calling to farewell to the Polish Mother (2012),⁷ argue that hegemonic myth of the Polish Mother, reproduced in feminist reflection, “became an unchanging reference point for analysis of the situation of women in Poland. In other words, we ourselves were reinforcing the myth that undermines female agency and reifies patriarchal gender constructs” (Hryciuk, Korolczuk, 2012, p. 13). Although I agree that the figure of the Polish Mother should not be applied uncritically as a hegemonic and universalizing category to the situation of contemporary women, the Black Protest proves that it still influences public debate and gender representations.

That is why I would like to apply categories introduced by Nowak to the Black Protest in order to fill in the gaps in the image of 2016 women’s mobilization and interpret it as a manifestation of conservative modernization. I am convinced it was successful because its rhetoric, iconography and organizational structure appealed to what Hryciuk describes as “the broader system of convictions and

cultural notions” (Hryciuk, 2017, p. 166)⁸, shaped by both conservative traditional images of Polish femininity, and neoliberal, postfeminist values – two tendencies, which, as I have argued, are a part of one story.

Feminism of the Polish Mothers

After October 3rd, in public debate it has been often emphasized that the Parliament’s decision to reject the anti-choice proposal was the first time when conservative and populist ruling party backed out in a response to social resistance. Having taken its office in 2015, *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (Law and Justice Party) has been gradually dismantling the basic tenets of liberal democracy, what evokes huge anti-government demonstrations. All of them have been ignored, except the one organized by women. Since then women have been often situated as the only political actor that can stop ruling party from its anti-democratical reforms. It was directly expressed also during the Black Protest in the slogan directed at prime minister: “Beata, unfortunately, your government will be overthrown by women” (*Beata, niestety, twój rząd obalą kobiety*). Situating women in such a powerful political position affirms strong, independent femininity.

In this narrative, impact of the Black Protest is not seen as a result of well-thought political strategy, but rather as an outcome of power of women’s shared emotions: anger and frustration. Women participating in the Black Protest were seen as strong not because they were a rational, organized political actor but rather because they formed unpredictable, unstoppable and emotionally-driven mass.

⁸ Hryciuk writes: “Some sociologists believe that a social movement can be successful when the collective action frames, including discourses, symbols, and patterns followed by their members, fit the broader system of convictions and cultural notions regarding a given phenomenon and thus meet with broad public resonance” (2017, p. 166).

Such a view is in compliance with tradition of perceiving women as irrational and hysterical.

Many photos from the protests present strong, self-confident women. Some of them wear black war paint on their faces. Music played at the demonstrations was cheering women to engage in a battle and emphasized their strength and readiness to fight for their rights. Such an image of the Black Protest refers to the idea of girl power, typical of Western postfeminist discourse, and strong, independent femininity, typical of Polish imagery. It may be argued that such a war rhetoric and iconography is typical of social mobilization that involves strong emotions. However, in this case, it was accompanied by references to nationalist and martyrological imagery. That is why I insist that reference to the figure of strong femininity recalls the myth of the Polish Mother.

According to Korolczuk, what mobilized uninformed observers was clever usage of cultural memes and action frames, those which are “not only flexible and easily personalized, but also emotionally alluring and having rich histories of social transmission” (Korolczuk, 2016, p. 103). One of such a meme was black color itself. Its emotional allure and symbolic power come from embeddedness and deep significance of the black color in local culture (Korolczuk, 2016, p. 103). The choice of color refers to the 19th century tradition of Polish women wearing black in order to mourn the country’s partition and loss of sovereignty. This is exactly the tradition that developed the myth of the Polish Mother.

As Korolczuk comments, the symbolic meaning of such a reference was “clear to all potential participants, conveying the gravity of the situation and indirectly linking the women’s struggle for reproductive rights with the complicated history of the Polish nation” (Korolczuk, 2016, p. 104). Prevalence of the black both in social media #Blackprotest

campaign and during street demonstrations was not the only way to invoke – and at the same time renegotiate – nationalistic and martyrological imagery. Many slogans directly referred to the figure of the Polish Mother, for instance “The Polish Mother – incubator, in the case of miscarriage – prosecutor” (*Matka Polka – inkubator, jak poroni – prokurator*). It was referred to, also less directly, by many well-known symbols and slogans associated with the times of foreign occupation and national independence uprisings, or – more generally – fight for independence and self-sacrifice for the nation. According to Korolczuk, such slogans were usually “altered in order to stress the gendered character of the fight against abortion ban” (Korolczuk, 2016, p. 104):

Popular were banners and pins with letter “P” inscribed in an anchor, which is a popular symbol of the Home Army and the 1944 Warsaw Uprising known as Fighting Poland, but with added woman’s breasts and a braid to signify the gendered nature of women’s mobilization. Some participants also displayed slogan “Fighting Polish Woman” (Polka Walcząca), “Independent Polish woman” (Polka niepodległa) or the words of the Polish national anthem “Poland has not yet perished” (Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła), replacing the word “Poland” with “Polka” signifying a female Polish citizen (2016, p. 104).

References to national symbols and martyrological ideals of femininity in the rhetoric and iconography of the Black Protest have been used as a creative and subversive way of elevating women’s reproductive rights and gendering nationalist imagery. They also have had pragmatic meaning: recalling representations of common struggle from the past made it easier to mobilize women and create sense of community and solidarity. However, these references have not been simply ironic

⁷ *Farewell to the Polish Mother? Discourses, Practices and Representations of Motherhood in Contemporary Poland (Pożegnanie z Matką Polką? Dyskursy, praktyki i reprezentacje macierzyństwa we współczesnej Polsce)* is the title of the book edited by Hryciuk and Korolczuk.

or pragmatic, but also indicative of real and continuous influence of the social genotype of Polish femininity on contemporary women's identities and public sphere in Poland.

In the Autumn of 2016, less than three weeks after October 3rd, pop singer and supporter of women's mobilization, Natalia Przybysz, came out about her own abortion. She recorded a protest song about her experience and described it in details in an interview, telling about her trip to Slovakia to get medical attention and receive abortion (Przybysz, 2017). The interview sparked a wave of attacks on her, also among participants of the Black Protest. They often emphasized that she decided to terminate her pregnancy because of selfish reasons (not feeling comfortable in average-sized apartment with another child). She was accused of corrupting the idea of the Black Protest and spoiling its image, since fulfilling privileged singer's selfish desires was not something that women were fighting for.

In my opinion the wave of hate directed against Natalia Przybysz has proven that traditional martyrological ideal of femininity is still powerful. According to Andrzej Leder, philosopher and publicist, women deploring Przybysz's decision were referring to their own self-image, which, as it's easy to notice, strongly resembles the social genotype of Polish women. In his view,

the key element of this image is self-sacrifice, "being good" that is guaranteed by abnegation of one's own needs in the name of the played social roles. [...] Moreover, requirements connected with this ideal can appear in a conservative form, as a role of the Polish Mother, but also – which is not that obvious – in a "liberal" form, as sacrifice for professional roles, or a left-wing one, when it comes to social engagement (Leder, 2017).

Anna Zawadzka, a feminist publicist, interprets the reactions to the singer's coming out in a similar way: "The interview with Natalia Przybysz revealed masochistic pattern of Polish culture, particularly addressed to women" (2016, p. 8). In her opinion, such a pattern is so deeply internalized by women that after the interview with the artist they could not accept that her story, free from trauma and moral drama, neither followed nor reproduced martyrological narrative of Polish motherhood and femininity. Przybysz aroused anger because she not only rejected imperative of self-sacrifice, but also broke the silence about pregnancy termination speaking about it without self-flagellation and without using the language of morality.

The myth of the Polish Mother not only supports heroic values, but also inseparably links femininity and motherhood. In my opinion the Black Protest to some extent has reproduced this tendency by situating mothers as privileged subjects. Masses of women were successfully mobilized because of specific interpretation of the "Stop Abortion" project in public debate. The proposal was not only said to involve risk that even if pregnancy threatens woman's life, doctors would desist performing abortions for fear of legal consequences. Many commentators also pointed out that there was a very real chance that women would be punished even after miscarriages. In this perspective, plan for a ban on abortion was seen as affecting especially those women, who want to have children and may already identify themselves as mothers.

Plan for a total ban on abortion has brought back martyrological models of femininity by demanding from women extreme self-sacrifice and heroism. However, it was not meant to give anything in return – women could not expect any gratification for imposed heroic motherhood. Being a mother in contemporary Poland no longer involves

symbolic gratification and social prestige of the nineteenth century Polish Mother. Due to the individualistic ideologies, neoliberal social policies, and "private maternalism"⁹, motherhood has been excluded from public sphere and deprived of political significance. Since women bearing and taking care of children do not fit into the model of desired neoliberal subject, the value of motherhood is no longer acknowledged.

Forced heroic motherhood with no gratification, implied by the proposal of abortion ban was far from social genotype of Polish women. Instead of social prestige they could have expected intimidation and threat of criminal prosecution, instead of appreciation – state surveillance and deprivation of privacy. "Stop Abortion" project, perceived as violating women's dignity, aroused their anger and frustration. Mobilized to protest against the proposal, protesters perfectly illustrated their interpretation of abortion ban in the aforementioned slogan "The Polish Mother – incubator, in the case of miscarriage – prosecutor" (*Matka Polka – inkubator, jak poroni – prokurator*). Similar perspective can be traced in many other slogans that appeared

at the demonstrations, which situate mothers as privileged subject of the Black Protest and main victims of planned anti-abortion legislation: "As dead, I will not bear a child" (*Martwa dziecka nie urodzę*), "Do not teach mother how to give birth to children" (*Nie ucz matki dzieci rodzić*), "Dead mother won't cuddle" (*Martwa matka nie przytuli*).

Such a narrative was privileged by the literary contest "my #blackprotest", organized by the Great Coalition for Equality and Choice, bringing together feminist organizations, and under patronage of mainstream liberal media. The contest was aimed to reveal motivation and experiences of the participants of the Black Protest, draw background of the protests and struggle for women's rights and dignity, as well as to promote Polish women's solidarity (Federacja na rzecz Kobiet i Planowania Rodziny, 2017a, 2017b). Jury decided to award three prizes. All awarded pieces were written in the perspective of mothers. In my opinion such a gesture aimed to improve the image of the Black Protest and women's movement in Poland by proving that those who resist anti-abortion legislation are not only feminists who reject femininity (including motherhood) and "promote killing innocent unborn children", but also "ordinary women", who want to have children or already have them. From PR point of view, in the context of public debate on abortion rights in Poland, mothers seem to be the best advocates of pro-choice movement. Privileging voices of mothers can be also interpreted as a manifestation of maternal turn in contemporary feminist movement in Poland, characterized by reevaluation of motherhood and care¹⁰.

⁹ According to Christy Glass and Eva Fodor, Poland's family policy can be described as "a form of 'private maternalism' in which the market and the family have become the primary institutions of welfare provision" (Glass, Fodor, 2007, p. 325). Private maternalism, as a kind of familialism, is a system of child support as well as ideology serving to legitimize it, in which responsibility for care work falls on women because of traditional gender roles distribution (Szelewa, 2015, p. 105).

The Programme "Family 500+", introduced in 2015 by the Polish conservative government, affects political context of motherhood in an ambivalent way. On the one hand, it supports the private sphere and parents' (in particular mothers') agency by direct money transfers, but on the other hand, it interferes with the privacy by privileging certain models of family and disciplining women's reproductive choices (for instance single mothers of one child, regardless of their income, are excluded from the child benefit).

¹⁰ The term "maternal turn" with reference to changes in feminist discourse in Poland was used by Agnieszka Graff in many articles and interviews (Graff, 2014a, 2017). It also appears in her book *Mother Feminist* from 2014, in which she accuses Polish feminist movement of lack of attention to experience of

The contest was an attempt to give discursive space to those women whose voice usually is silenced, but who could have engaged in the Black Protest thanks to its inclusivity. Such a gesture is in compliance with the prevalent narrative of 2016 women's mobilization as a revolution of "ordinary women", directly articulated by Majewska in her essay *Weak Resistance and The Power of The Powerless*. Not specifying this category precisely, she opposes "ordinary women" to "big city leaders" (Majewska, 2017, p. 30), "middle-class women" (Majewska, 2017, p. 25) and emphasizes the Black Protest's inclusivity, egalitarianism and prevalence. Organizers of the protests, interviewed by sociologists Katarzyna Murawska and Zofia Włodarczyk, also identify themselves as "ordinary women", stressing grassroots character of the mobilization and opposing themselves to feminists and politicians (Murawska, Włodarczyk, 2017, p. 8). As Agnieszka Imbierowicz argues, present-day Polish Mother "often takes the form of an 'ordinary woman', also very often she is characterized as being in opposition to feminists, which may suggest that the feminist movement is not needed" (2012, p. 144). In the light of this interpretation,

"ordinary" denotes not only those deprived of influence and status, but also simply mothers.

This perspective situates the Black Protest, paradoxically, within the context of new ways of politicization of the parenthood, and parents' mobilizations, that emerged in Poland in last few years (see: Hryciuk, Korolczuk, 2015, pp. 11–41). Looking for the roots of the Black Protest as a women's mass mobilization, Iza Desperak takes a step back and refers to the history of mothers' movements in Poland. She mentions Women's Hunger Marches, organized in the city of Łódź in the Summer of 1981 by Solidarity, and more contemporary movement of *Alimentaries*, mothers dependent on the benefits paid out from the the Alimony Fund, protesting in 2002–2004 against the plan to abolish the Fund (Desperak, 2017, p. 19). What those movements have in common is their subject: mothers in the traditional role of feeders.

However, as Renata Hryciuk points out, women protesting against the plan to abolish the Alimony Fund, did not invoke the myth of the Polish Mother (Hryciuk, 2017). What is more, they attempted to avoid all references to motherhood and even tried to replace term "mother" with "parent", "person" or focus on children. Instead, their rhetoric and claims were based on the language of civil rights, which turned out to be effective (Hryciuk, 2017). Why did Polish Mother came back to public debate several years later, in an unexpected context of women's mobilization against abortion ban?

After 2015, when socially conservative Law and Justice party won parliamentary elections, civil society has awakened in response to gradual dismantling of the basic tenets of liberal democracy. As Korolczuk argues, as a result "street protests became normalized as a mean of communication between the citizens and power holders" (Korolczuk, 2016, p. 98). References to Solidarity, patriotism

and nationalist imagery turned out to be its significant part, especially for the rhetoric of Committee for the Defense of Democracy (KOD). It may have simply permeated the rhetoric of the Black Protest, since many participants and organizers of protests against abortion ban were connected with KOD, and women's mobilization was successful to some extent thanks to KOD's resources.

Rhetoric based on strong national imagery and martyrological ideal of the Polish Mother may also have seemed to be the only potentially fruitful response to illiberal practices of Polish government. Language of civil rights, effective in early 2000s, when Poland was accessing the European Union, could have failed in times of global retreat from liberal democracy.

For freedom of choice and privacy

In the article about abortion rights in Poland, published in *The Guardian* in November 2017, Alex Cocotas writes:

Abortion lies at the intersection of the two major trends that emerged in Polish society after the fall of communism in 1989. The first of those trends is social conservatism, which flows from the reinvigorated Catholic church. The second is the enthusiastic embrace of economic liberalism that began in late 1989, when Poland became one of few countries to voluntarily submit to the IMF's "shock therapy". The church's drive to ban abortion was matched by neoliberals' desire to remove the state from economic life. Abortion ceased to be a medical procedure and became a moral issue; it ceased to be a medical right and became a commodity (Cocotas, 2017).

In such a perspective, shared by many Polish anti-neoliberal feminists, public debate on abortion rights in Poland has been a perfect manifestation of conservative modernization.

According to many authors, the Black Protest radically broke with such logic in conceptualizing abortion. It revolutionized the public debate on pregnancy termination by restoring the language of women's rights. According to Julia Kubisa and Dorota Szelewa, respectively social researcher and political scientist, by breaking with tradition of reducing abortion into a matter of worldview or morality, abortion rights have become a social issue (Kubisa, 2016; Szelewa, 2017a).

Kubisa claims that the Black Protest managed to introduce such a perspective to the broader public thanks to the formula of strike. She argues that although at the beginning trade unions hesitated to support protests, the Black Protest adopted a formula of All Poland's Women Strike, erasing distinction between "the social left" and "the cultural left". Thanks to it women could have proved that "right to abortion is not a dark side alley of women's live, but a part of a health policy, which in turn is a part of social policy, linked with economic policy, job market policy and fiscal policy" (Kubisa, 2016).

Nonetheless, the theme of strike does not seem to be prevalent in media and participants' representations of the women's mobilization. In order to engage in protests, women did not have to leave their work and many participants did not decide to actually go on strike. I agree with Korolczuk that it was rather the open formula – which enabled women to support the Black Protest by engaging in chosen activities, depending on their free time, skills and preferences and without having to follow the logic of strike – that made it such a success (Korolczuk, 2016, p. 103).

In media representations October 3rd is more often defined as the Black Protest than the All-Poland's Women Strike. As a cultural meme, the women's strike was much less enthusiastically shared and less successful than the idea to wear black. It was not flexible

motherhood and interests of mothers (Graff, 2014b). The book evoked heated debate on feminism and its relationship to motherhood, care, solidarity and neoliberalism, reaching even mainstream media. "Maternal turn" seems to be just a symptom of much broader turn from neoliberal to social feminism, that characterizes contemporary feminist movement in Poland. It could be understood as series of heterogeneous practices and discourses, critical towards gendered neoliberalism. It is based on attempts to include social issues in feminist agenda, reject opposition between redistribution and recognition, lobby for "mothering" of the state as well as revalue solidarity, care and community. Its representatives focus on the socially and economically underprivileged and often create broad alliances. For characteristic of this turn see: Szelewa, 2017b, pp. 11–19; Hryciuk, Korolczuk, 2015, pp. 27–36.

enough – according to Korolczuk, participation in strike was not available “for economically underprivileged women and to people in smaller towns and villages, where scarcity of jobs and conservative local milieu make it risky to publicly engage in potentially controversial issues, such as reproductive rights” (2016, p. 103). Perhaps, however, it was less successful not only because of lack of flexibility, but also because it was not as emotionally alluring as all the associations that the black color evoked. It referred to the 1975 Icelandic women strike, an event which is not embedded in local culture but also to the Solidarity movement. Although comparison to the Solidarity revolution has appeared in feminist discourse on the Black Protest – according to Majewska, both the Black Protest and Solidarity revolution were based on non-heroic “resistance of the weak” (Majewska, 2017, pp. 25–42) – it has not reached the broader public debate. Nationalistic and martyrological imagery, in which wearing black by women is embedded, seems to be still more powerful.

What is more, the idea to wear black has had much greater visual potential. As such, it has become a basis of the campaign #Blackprotest, which a few days before October 3rd conquered the social media and mobilized many people to engage in the protests. Both men and women posted photos of themselves wearing black with #Blackprotest. Under common slogan all participants could express themselves in their own voice. Since the starting idea could be adjusted to one’s own needs and capabilities, some women published highly stylized pictures of their faces or whole bodies, the others showed black outfit details. Some participants were posing alone, the others – with friends, family or co-workers. The hashtag could be used to construct one’s own individual story and

identity without need to acquire any collective identity¹¹.

What is worth noticing, the hashtag was used also by many famous celebrities from outside feminist movement, which definitely contributed to its great popularity. Act of resistance towards plan for a ban on abortion quickly was absorbed by the logic of massive consumption and capitalism. As such, it became a part of desired lifestyle and image, “an act of personal expression and recognition or self-validation” (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012, p. 753–754), rather than clear political statement; neither was it a sign of adopting collective political identity.

In my conviction the idea of #Blackprotest turned out to be such a successful cultural meme because it perfectly appealed to the “strong, independent women who shrug at the very idea of ‘discrimination’” and reproduced the neoliberal, individualistic and narcissistic logic of postfeminism, which puts a strong emphasis on lifestyle choices, control over one’s own physical appearance and constructing the individual self.

Although Kubisa spreads the narrative of change, having analyzed slogans, which appeared at the demonstrations, she points out that many of them share one common denominator: focus on free choice (Kubisa, 2016). Rhetoric of the Black Protest, based on slogans such as: “I am not pro-abortion, I am pro-choice” (*Nie jestem za aborcją, jestem za wolnym wyborem*), “I live in free Poland. I have a free choice” (*Żyję w wolnej Polsce. Mam wolny wybór*), “The choice belongs to me” (*Wybór należy do mnie*), does not indicate that it managed to break with conservative modernization and introduce the language of reproductive rights in the public debate. It rather

makes me think of it as of manifestation of neoliberal status quo: individualistic discourse fetishizing vaguely understood freedom of choice, rather than radical discursive change, i.e. feminist struggle for reproductive rights for every woman, based on solidarity and aiming at social justice.

Moreover, since protests were organized against abortion ban, not for liberalizing very restrictive anti-abortion legislation, freedom referred to in slogans is very limited. I agree with Leder, who argues that “the Black Protest has not expressed any change of way of thinking about pregnancy termination, but it was all about defense of the sense of freedom within already established frameworks” (Leder, 2017). As such, it perfectly illustrates paradoxes of conservative modernization in Poland by proving that it is possible to fight for freedom of choice by defending one of the most restrictive anti-abortion law and condemning a woman who decided to speak about her abortion.

Calling for freedom of choice rather than specific rights may result in politically fruitless escapism. Such an attitude seems to be adopted by many protesting women. A lot of those who actively participated in demonstrations claimed that they remained apolitical and rejected the politics, which is in compliance with social genotype of Polish femininity described by Titkow (Murawska, Włodarczyk, 2017, p. 8).

Such an “apolitical” attitude, rejection of identity politics, as well as restricting its political aims to resistance towards abortion ban, suggest that the Black Protest should not be perceived as a feminist revolution, but rather as a mobilization against the state and its attempts to deprive women of their right to privacy. Analysis of the slogans and iconography used by the protesters confirms that the proposal of a near-total ban on abortion was seen as illegitimate intervention of the state

in the private, the intrusion of the political in a private body.

As such, it does not transform civil society, but rather reflects its conservative position. According to Beata Pająk, since in the Polish People’s Republic civil rights were limited, “what remained was freedom in the private sphere. Privacy created protection from artificiality of public life and from ‘them’ who epitomized power separated from real life” (Pająk, 2007, p. 114). Referring to Wiktor Osiatyński she argues that civil society that emerged in those times was organized against the state and “served (...) limitation of the state’s supremacy over a society and an individual” (Osiatyński, 2004, p. 141). The Black Protest, calling for strengthening the privacy, has recalled “strong distinction between private and public, with the public being negatively associated with the state and seen as antagonistic to the private sphere” (Jacobsson, 2017, p. 85). It proved that such legacies of socialist time as lack of trust towards the state and fetishization of the privacy still influence civil society in Poland.

Zawadzka also recognizes that the Black Protest to much extent was a manifestation for right to privacy rather than for reproductive rights. Concerned about treating abortion as a private matter, she points out that this rhetoric goes even further: abortion is reduced here not only to privacy, but to female body. She gives many examples of the Black Protest’s slogans and images referring to “ovaries, uteruses, oviducts, vaginas, breasts and underpants”, fearing that they reproduce “dominant discourse, that reduces women to body and makes women’s life determined by the bodily capacities” (Zawadzka, 2016, p. 6). Since protesters do not recognize abortion as a reproductive right and reduce it to the private sphere, declare themselves as apolitical and reject any collective political identity, femininity is reduced to bodily property. Such

¹¹ For analysis of the Black Protest as a manifestation of the logic of connective action see Korolczuk, 2017, pp. 38–41.

a gesture is in line with neoliberal postfeminist ideology, because defining femininity “as a bodily property rather than a social, structural or psychological one” seems to be one of its discursive aspects (Gill, 2007, p. 149).

The rhetoric of the Black Protest is based on the liberal interpretation of private-public division. As Edyta Pietrzak and Anna Fligel, theoreticians of politics, point out, in the context of such an interpretation, “the situation happening in Poland is an illustration of the appropriation of the private sphere by the public one” (2017, p. 299). Protesters did not chant “the personal is political” for a reason. They rather thought that “this is necessary to defend the private sphere and to strengthen its privacy” (Fligel and Pietrzak, 2017, p. 299).

The story of continuity told in this article certainly is not the only legitimate interpretation of the Black Protest. Since 2016 women’s mobilization against abortion ban was grassroots, decentralized, affective and consisting of many dispersed actions, both online and offline, it is difficult to grasp and conceptualize all its aspects. It does not mean, however, that feminist academics and leaders can project their desires and ideas about what contemporary women’s mobilization should look like and what actually happened in Poland in 2016. It is not up to them to decide about the movement, protesters’ motivation, values and emotions. However, I am convinced that it is worthwhile to give up the story of change and come to terms with the fact that the Black Protest was not a feminist revolution. At the same time, it needs to be recognized that in spite of its “apolitical” character, it actually was politically successful and extremely needed in the situation of contemporary Poland. Perhaps, when reproductive rights were not only limited, but also in danger of further restrictions and we face global turn towards

illiberal democracy, the most politically fruitful feminist strategy is to reject politics of identity and make feminist movement’s borders as porous as possible. It would let us find a place for those who declare rejecting the political and are eager to fight for very basic frames of freedom and privacy, even if they “shrug at the very idea of ‘discrimination’”. 👁

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Abstrakt

Artykuł stanowi krytyczną analizę retoryki masowej mobilizacji społecznej przeciwko planowi całkowitego zakazu aborcji, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem Czarnego Protestu, zainicjowanego w mediach społecznościowych we wrześniu 2016 roku i zwieńczonego Ogólnopolskim Strajkiem Kobiet 3 października 2016. Polemizuję z dominującą feministyczną narracją, konceptualizującą Czarny Protest jako radykalną transformację polskiej debaty publicznej i społeczeństwa obywatelskiego, a także manifestację zmieniającą się tożsamości „zwykłych kobiet” i ich stosunku do tego, co polityczne. Zrywając z narracją zmiany, postuluje narrację ciągłości, dowodząc, że kobieca mobilizacja z 2016 roku zakończyła się sukcesem i zmobilizowała tak wiele różnych kobiet, ponieważ wykorzystywała dobrze znany neoliberalny dyskurs i głęboko zakorzenione społeczne genotypy kobiecości, takie jak figura Matki Polki i niezastąpionej menadżerki życia rodzinnego.

Słowa kluczowe: mobilizacja społeczna, strajk kobiet, aborcja, feminizm, Polska, Matka Polka, prawa reprodukcyjne.



Resistance in the Polish Formal Education System The Feminist Perspective

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to outline new perspectives in research on the category of resistance in the formal education system in Poland. I adopt the feminist perspective because I am convinced that the issue of gender and sexuality in Polish school is particularly tabooed and marginalised, which reinforces the existing system of cultural, political and economic domination. This system is materialised in the form of a new education reform, closely associated with the government and dominant religion. Polish student and teacher use social media, they can learn about social protests (including #metoo action and protests in defence of court independence) and take active part in them. What certainly connects both spaces (off-line and on-line) is a post-truth category¹.

¹ A new research area in media studies, already present in curriculums, e.g. in Sweden

School as a space for reproduction (cultural, economic) and a place of resist. Theoretical contexts

Research concepts created in the field of the sociology of education in the 1960s and 1970s, gave us a picture of school as a place of cultural reproduction and consolidation of political and economic domination. This school was supposed to reproduce and modify the knowledge and the dominant system of values and attitudes, as well as economic and political relations. The vision of reality, communicated by the schools, recognised values and tools for their reproduction, created a pedagogical discourse. Basil Bernstein² defined it as:

Specialised form of communication through which the subjects of the pedagogical process are created in a selective manner [...] (and) under which a differentiated transmission of knowledge and assimilation takes place (Bernstein 1990, p. 167).

From the wide spectrum of knowledge about the world and man, educational institutions choose some part to transform it into a coherent vision of reality. The ambiguity and diversity within the students' identity are reduced. Unclear and ambiguous areas are ignored. Only politically "safe" topics are discussed. In this way, important aspects of the human identity are covered with a veil of silence. In Polish schools, such topics include gender and sexuality (Stoch 2015).

School, as a place of discursive shaping of identity, uses symbolic violence defined as (...) *imposing cultural arbitrariness by arbitrary authority* (Bourdieu, Passeron 1990, p. 61). The process of school socialisation lasts until a full

education is achieved, that is a *habitus* – (...) *effect of the internalisation of the principles of cultural arbitrariness capable of self-recreating after pedagogical discourse stops and thereby recreating the principles of internalised arbitrariness in practice* (Bourdieu, Passeron 1990, p. 90).

Cultural reproduction is carried out by applying: distribution (rules controlling the right to the production of educational discourse), recontextualization (rules of processing and reduction of available knowledge) and evaluation (rules for knowledge reproduction) (Bernstein 1990).

Knowledge of the rules of cultural reproduction is the domain of the pedagogical staff. The task of the students is (...) *to obey*. In the existing system of power, it is extremely difficult to resist the oppression (which was pointed out by Bourdieu and Passeron), because domination relations seem natural and indisputable. It is only after we expose this "naturalness", reveal the rules of the school performance, that we can resist. Theorists of cultural and economic reproduction give relatively little thought to the category of resistance. Students were perceived mainly as passive objects of social "production" (Rakoczy 2015, p. 52).

According to Bourdieu, social actors are unevenly equipped with four forms of capital: economic (material goods), social (networks of contacts, positions and relationships in groups), cultural (knowledge, "familiarity"; education, taste, lifestyle) and symbolic (symbols used to maintain capital). Their use depends on the characteristics of social actors and the context (Bourdieu 2004). The key social actors in the school are: students, teachers, parents, peoples holding senior positions. Change depends on involvement of all of them. Changes can only be brought about by new competent staff: critically thinking, committed, sensitive. These people working in schools as professionals are responsible for the organization,

relations and culture of education within the framework defined by political power. They give space (or not) for critical thinking, discussion, dialogue, reflection, participation in decisions making. They use different types of power or implement the idea of equality. Critically or without reflection, they use the guidelines in the core curriculum and textbooks. They notice or do not and react or not to manifestations of discrimination, violation of borders, abuse.

The only exception is the approach of "emancipatory pedagogy" which have included the category of resistance as a key concept for understanding school interactions. As a representative of the Frankfurt School, Paulo Freire (in his scientific works) drew attention to the fact that culture and education are closely linked with politics and economics. Thanks to Freire, pedagogical programs from the 1960s and 1970s have been verified in terms of the creative potential of male and female students. Freire asked for emancipation education, which is to serve the struggle for liberation from the rule of domination structures. The basic tool of resistance was critical thinking and transformative actions aimed at demythologisation of reality. Freire drew attention to the discrimination and opposition of students and teachers. Emancipation should include all subjects of educational processes. It is mutual growth to solidarity, responsibility for oneself and critical reflection. Dialogue is the key for understanding and building solidarity (Freire 1996).

This approach also appears in the works of Henry A. Giroux (2001) and Peter McLaren (2015). They recognize the features of resistance in critical thinking and emancipatory and transformational action. They occur in a school, in which students critically reflect on the mechanisms of prejudice, social injustice and reproduction of material goods, and acquire the ability to transform their own environment

(e.g. through the ability to participate in a dialogue). Such understood resistance should be examined, among others, by measuring attitudes towards the school (Giroux 1991).³

Polish research on resistance in education

The latest Polish research on the category of resistance in education provides order into the existing theoretical material. It recognises resistance understood as:

- ▶ a form of reaction of consciousness under the influence of undesirable content, thanks to which the subject defends its frontiers against the attempts of categorisation and objectification (psychoanalytical approach),
- ▶ a form of deliberate and purposeful questioning of the *status quo* in order to free oneself from the oppression and create new social conditions: free from domination, overcoming individual alienation, discomfort, automatic thinking (Marxist approach),
- ▶ strategy of coping with power relations by creating new forms of subjectivity (thought by Michel Foucault),
- ▶ interactive phenomenon, consisting in conscious (or not) resisting the institution through open rebellion or withdrawal (interactive approach),
- ▶ form of emancipation and transformation activities, consisting in the refusal to obey an institution that acts in an unfair and damaging manner (perspective present in emancipation education and in the form of civil disobedience),
- ▶ a form of contestation of the existing system of values and an attempt to

² Referring to *Reproduction. Elements of theory of education* by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron, 1990.

³ For those interested in further reading in this area, I recommend the publications of Ewa Bilińska-Suchana (2006, 2009, 2011, 2013).

replace it with a new one (research on counter-cultures),

- ▶ a ritual manifesting itself in bodily forms of expression, etc. (Pasikowski 2014).

These forms of resistance are divided into individual and institutional (group), internal (within the institution) and external (beyond its framework). Attention is also paid to the purposefulness, reflexivity and criticality of thinking (Pasikowski 2014, p. 109). The processual approach, to which Pasikowski draws attention, is important: resistance is usually not a single form of resisting but a complex process (Pasikowski 2014, p. 113).

One of the the most interesting concepts present in the last study of the category of resistance is the model of “rose emancipation”, which provides for four forms of opposition (rejection) to the imposed oppression:

- ▶ avoidance (unconscious opposition, expressed in withdrawal and passivity),
- ▶ disagreement (unconscious opposition, combined with reluctance, disapproval of norms and experiencing discomfort),
- ▶ rebellion (open and conscious opposition to the dependence),
- ▶ innovation (open and conscious opposition to dependence, but additionally directed at the transformation of social conditions) (Pasikowski 2014, p. 117).

At the end of this brief summary, I should mention a large study on the emancipatory theory of education by Maria Czerepniak-Walczak (2006). The author shows the sources of the Polish tradition of “emancipational pedagogy”, lists the methods and forms of emancipation through education, and draws attention to the methodological contexts of emancipation pedagogy.

Era of post-truth and educational reforms in Poland – basic contexts for new forms of resistance

As it was previously mentioned, modern students are functioning not only in the real world, but also in an alternative reality, ruled by media logic, including the so-called new media. Through them, reality is re-created and reproduced for an infinite number of times. Reproduction of reality gives way to its simulation (when sign refers only to other signs, and the reality itself is blurred, Baudrillard 2005, p. 11).

This “new reality” is made of memory units that are connected in a specific narrative framework. As Baudrillard wrote with reference to traditional media, “hyper-reality is secured (...) against any possibility of distinguishing what is real from what is imagined” (Baudrillard 2005, p. 7). Simulations of reality undermine the difference between truth and false, reality and imagination about it (Baudrillard 2005, p. 9). The so-called truth (objective cause) ceases to exist. It is mediated not by one medium (radio, television, press), but by a hyperlink of references and mediations. Lack of ability to verify information in the network favours the shaping of post-truth – a manipulated narrative about reality, which is regarded as true only because it has been repeated many times (Keys 2017). Post-truth is a story that is considered to be true, because it stirs the emotions and imagination of crowds, lacking the competence of critical reflection on the action of the media and on own emotions.

Logic of post-truth seems to be strongly used in Polish schools. The repeated narrative about reality (former and contemporary) creates its seemingly true image. As Baudrillard has already noted, (...) *the myths of beginning and signs of reality (...), secondary truths, objectivities and authenticities multiply and grow in*

price (Baudrillard 2005, p. 12). Since public education is a political venture, in Poland a new reform plan is launched almost every time the government changes. Fundamental changes were initiated in 1989, when the democratically elected government overturned the PRL constitution of the 1950s, and introduced democracy and free market economy in place of the socialist system. At the same time, the role of the catholic church increased. Gymnasiums were introduced in 1999 only to be removed in September 2017. In 2004, Poland joined the European Union⁴ and since 2005 the matura exam has been organised according to new, constantly improved principles.

Since 2017, the new government of the Law and Justice party has been introducing next education reform, the main element of which is the to reform the structure of educational system. The system known 17 years ago now returns: it is based on an 8-year primary school and a 4–5-year high school (<http://reformaedukacji.men.gov.pl/>, access: 08.01.2018). Vocational schools are to be replaced with second degree trade schools. The manner, in which the reform is being introduced, provokes strong criticism from teaching community, as well as from university staff and the Polish Academy of Sciences. As early as in October 2016, ninety-nine representatives of university circles involved in teaching polish language wrote a letter to the Minister of

Education, Anna Zalewska, with the following criticism:

- a) failure to provide the public with substantive justification for the liquidation of gymnasiums,
- b) lack of long-term consultations of new core curricula with an expert group,
- c) system and program changes introduced too quickly,
- d) lowering the rank of the “Polish language” as a school subject, the perspective of limiting the freedom of teachers in the sphere of choosing program content, and the manner of their implementation (“Polonistyka. Innowacje” 2016/4, s. 191–196).

It was stressed that the assumptions of the new reform and the way it is introduced could ruin all the achievements after 1989. Public discourse on reforms of education requires further research, but even a brief analysis makes us realize that it is not so much about structural and program changes as about in-depth reform of educational goals. They are to be subordinated to the idea of a national and religious state (although this is not formulated explicitly). And so, for the “proper” patriotism to exist, it is necessary to re-invent the “proper” idea of the fatherland and citizenship. In order to establish the “real” narrative about the past, the history must be “substantiated” again. This is supported by the recurring pattern of “banking education”, defined and described by Paulo Freire (Freire 1993, 2016). Its characteristics include:

- a) emphasis on reproduction of ready knowledge, provided by “professional” teachers,
- b) dominance of slogan-based narratives (for example on values), monologues and instructions,
- c) practices of mythization of reality,
- d) objectification of students and reducing all forms of resistance (Freire 1996).

⁴ The same institution, which now launched Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union against Poland. The Council states a serious violation by Poland of the main values of the EU, referred to in Article 2: “respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society based on pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men” (Journal of Laws .2004.90.864/30 – Treaty on European Union – consolidated text recognising the changes introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon).

Students who stand out from others are excluded from the community life. The research results of the Anti-discrimination Education Association⁵ confirmed that there are persistent discriminatory structures in Polish schools that reinforce:

- ▶ lower status of girls and women and different standards to treat both sexes,
- ▶ traditional masculinity patterns based on strength, physical fitness and heterosexuality,
- ▶ domination of roman catholic religion,
- ▶ unequal access to education for people with disabilities,
- ▶ authoritarian power of adults and limiting children's rights (Gawlicz, Rudnicki, Starnawski, 2015).

It is strongly possible that newly promoted identity models will favour xenophobic, sexist and homophobic attitudes. It was precisely due to school homophobia that Dominik, student from school in Biezuń committed suicide, and few months ago (2018), Kacper (also student) from Gorczyn did the same. For them, suicide was the ultimate, radical and dramatic form of resistance to the school violence.

At the end I would like to add that in Polish schools sex education and media education do not exist at all. After school hours, hate speech is transferred by the students themselves to the internet, to social forums, posing a real threat to children and adolescents. Research from 2014, which involved a group of youth aged 16–18, showed that 70% of young people came across racist statements on the internet (58% heard such statements in conversations with friends) (Bilewicz, ed.

2014). The percentage of people who encountered homophobic and sexist hate speech was equally high. Since then, the situation only worsens.

The issue of reproductive health (access to contraception, abortion and conscious motherhood, freedom from sexual violence, access to reliable sexual education) is not addressed at all.

Teaching in the days of patriarchal backlash, post-truth and growing nationalist tendencies is a particular challenge for pedagogues.

Resistance in the feminist perspective. Polish contexts

Thanks to feminist thought, it was noticed that "private is political", i.e. our everyday choices, including educational ones, are part of the wider social structures. These structures were called patriarchy, a system of domination based on polarity and hierarchy of genders (associated with other characteristics of personal identity). This system – as Carol Gilligan argued – (...) *separates one man from another, separates men from women and divides women into good and bad ones (...). It is a process of fragmentation of the psyche* (2013, p. 145).

According to Gilligan, the tools of patriarchy are embarrassment and exclusion, so common in Polish schools. (...) *The initiation of children into the patriarchal order leaves behind a loss and some defects, that we use to associate with trauma* – says Gilligan (p. 28). Therefore, schools teach forgetting, alienating students from each other. The essence of oppression is separating the oppressed from their stories, replacing these stories with culturally accepted narratives. Those who resist, are "embarrassed, beaten, excluded, mocked, rejected and condemned" (p. 29). They suffer. The breakdown of peer relationships is part of the internalization of gender-related norms.

That is why the source of the transformational resistance – according to Gilligan – are mainly women, as those who are able to transform psychological resistance into political action. Recovery of anger as a signal of enslavement and injustice is crucial (p. 127). When emotions connect with recognition, awakening occurs.

Thus, resisting the dominance requires intergenerational solidarity (p. 130). Bridging the gap between students and teachers, setting common goals and revealing mutual connections.

Adoption of the feminist perspective makes me realize that in Poland we now need alternative forms of sexual education, real centers of social dialogue and well-thought, consistent strategies of symbolic "sabotage" inside the institution of the school. We need transformational and emancipatory resistance, which is an active and peaceful response to violence that we experience as citizens from the institution of the state and school.

The starting point should be a critical reflection on the mechanisms of violence, aimed at emancipation and empowerment. In this reflection, we must find a space for our personal stories, as a place of recognition and resisting. Working with the body (real and symbolic body), even when interpreting literary texts, is already a form of resistance to the taboo of body.

From critical reflection, we must go to action, as sole criticism of the system can end withdrawal and manipulation. Our society is critical, but it does not know what to criticise and how to turn it into active action. Therefore, it no longer trusts any media, choosing the narrative about reality that will at least temporarily drive off the sense of complete hopelessness. Each didactic activity should contain an element combining it with the social reality.

The transmitted knowledge should always be related to current social, political, cultural

and economic contexts. In times of crisis of democratic values, we need science and humanities to be involved, and capable of transforming actions. One of the radical forms of resistance in contemporary school is real dialogue and the ability to work with conflict in a group.

Each teacher should honestly talk with his/her students about the context in which they gain knowledge. Revealing the rules of the school performance, exposing them, is the basis for the development of consensus and intergenerational solidarity.

Retaking the school also mean: revealing emotions (of course in an atmosphere of security and trust) and working on them; interpretations that take into account not only individual points of view, but also the interest and good of the group (thus search and education for consensus); education involving not only the mind but also the body (e.g. through a spectacle) – as a form of liberating the disciplined body (as Foucault would like); recovery of the "memory of loss" in discussions over childhood; building a utopia and caring for each other.

Finally, it should be added that the research on the category of resistance in education alone can no longer be the activity in which the scientist hides his or her motivation and position (even if they mostly are). We need new methods to study the school, which will strengthen local communities in dialogue rather than appropriating and neutralising the resistance. Open conversation and collective self-reflection within the so-called research in action (Červinková, Gołębniak, ed. 2010) should replace the "cataloguing frenzy" and typologising. Research should open the communication space.

5 The Anti-discrimination Education Society (TEA) was founded in 2009 by persons involved in anti-discrimination education. The Anti-discrimination Education Society brings together several dozen persons who specialize in this area. More about this on: <http://www.tea.org.pl/eng/index>, 10.05.2018

6 The term Umberto Eco, describing the way of meticulously describing things.

Summary

This article is a conceptual work, combining considerations about economic and cultural reproduction at school with a feminist perspective. In the first part of the article I make a reference to the well-known theory of cultural reproduction and symbolic violence of P. Bourdieu, which is the theoretical framework for further argumentation. I bring to light the work of P. Freire who, in thinking about the role of pupils and students, considered their creative potential and the ability to resist institutions. According to Freire, a key tool of resistance is dialogue.

In the second part of the article, I discuss Polish studies on the category of resistance in education. I emphasize the processual and emancipation approaches. I am referring to the current cultural and media contexts (related to the post-truth category) and political (education reform) to draw attention to the recurring model of banking education (Freire), closely related to the reproduction of xenophobic, sexist and homophobic attitudes.

In the third part, I made an introduction to Polish studies on the category of resistance in education as a feminist perspective. I draw attention to the need for transformational and emancipatory resistance, which is an active and peaceful response to violence, which we experience (as citizens) from the institution of the state and school. The starting point should be a critical reflection on the mechanisms of violence, aimed at emancipation and empowerment.

The next elements of the process are: working with the body, critical analysis of media messages, reconstruction of power relations at school, contextual teaching, work with emotions, dialogue. This is a difficult task, as the power relations in school remain not transparent. The contemporary Polish school needs new research methods that will open

the space for dialogue and build a community of transformative activities. In some sense, teachers of all types of schools has enough resources to get involved. The following simple questions could be inspiring to start with a few simple questions:

- ▶ How would I describe my current situation? Can I change it?
- ▶ Who creates/generates the standards applicable in my institution?
- ▶ How do I go from mental resistance to political resistance? What form of resistance is safe and constructive for me? Do I have any allies?
- ▶ What are my resources? ☹

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Lesbian Studies as a Way of Countering Non-Sexual Feminisms in Poland

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Abstract

This article offers a reflection on the current state of affairs regarding sexuality studies in general and the representation of non-heterosexual women in particular in contemporary academia and feminisms. As a lesbian scholar based in Poland, I am attempting to establish a separate lesbian-studies discourse in the Polish academia on the one hand, and encourage a great dose of interdisciplinarity in moving towards re-adjusted and re-defined lesbian feminisms on the other. Having defended my doctoral dissertation, I am going to re-visit and summarise one of its parts, namely the question of inadequacies of contemporary gender studies. Although the overall character of my activity can be situated within the sociology of sexuality, I tend to conceptualise the problems in question through the prism of sociology of knowledge and human geography, and especially the branches of feminist geography and geographies of sexualities. Altogether, I am going to briefly look into several contemporary gender and/or women's studies programmes in Poland in order to show both their incapacity to deal with female sexuality and, as a consequence, their erasure of lesbianity. Needless to say, the brief analysis herein is merely the start of the discussion as it offers only a sample of exploratory efforts with regard to the question of academic feminisms, but it is one that reveals some alarming tendencies.

Keywords:

lesbian studies, sociology of knowledge, gender studies, geographies of sexualities, lesbian feminism.

Introduction

This article can be considered a brief summation of the purposes and conceptual problems that my academic activity has been revolving around to date, namely the dimensions and spaces of lesbian subjectivities in society and in the academia. As a sociologist of knowledge and a “sexual geographer” (Browne, Lim and Brown, 2007, p. 5), I tend to explore the question of female sexuality through **engaged critique** and language that can be described as interventionist. With this in mind, I am going to focus on the matter that I have been concerned with most recently, i.e. the **discursive lacks within feminist languages and events** – both academic and social – with regard to a plethora of non-heterosexual subjectivities¹. More specifically, I wish to scrutinise the overall construction and framework of women’s and gender studies programmes. Although my actual doctoral dissertation analysed many a university programme from around the globe, this article will be of more local character, offering an engaged critique of the state of affairs regarding the Polish dimension of social and academic feminism exclusively. To my mind, the contents of many of the present-day gender studies programmes are rather inadequate when it comes to dealing with the question of sexuality in general and representing non-heterosexual women in particular. Therefore, this article contains **a very preliminary and descriptive semantic**

field analysis with regard to four gender studies programmes available in Poland. Its role is, for now, to merely **highlight some worrying tendencies towards one-dimensionality and the reinforcement of the exclusion of sexuality**. Before I develop this theme, however, an introduction to my motives and the character of my work seems to be in order.

Although this is somewhat less relevant to the purposes of the contents herein, I have been known to merge the lesbian with a properly adjusted queer perspective. This, as I have come to recognise, is one aspect of my activity that has drawn much controversy²; the notion of queer has usually been put in opposition to the efforts to reclaim lesbian identities rather than in line with them. Mine is a different approach. I tend to criticise the ‘mainstream’ queer, pointing out that the term ‘queer theory’ is, in fact, an incorrect phrase, for ‘queer’ and ‘theory’ are contradictory notions. In the humanities, ‘theory’ has always been – one way or another – linked with universal laws and grand explanations; ‘queer’, on the other hand, was always supposed to counter these³. As much as the concept of queer should remain undefined, then, it seems permissible to appreciate what it should **not** be associated with. Observing these tendencies within social sciences and sexuality studies made me re-focus and re-interpret queer as a perspective, a disposition, a standpoint, and – more importantly – a **method**⁴. Seen this way, queer becomes a tool, **through which**

the lesbian can be recovered and developed. Although the implications of this are numerous, it is language where the queer approach of mine is the most visible; queer will have to remain an operation on the patriarchal language of ‘Western’⁵ societies. The simplest way of showing this comes with my subversion of, and objection to, the overtly popular term ‘lesbianism’; pathologising and diminishing, it is a good reminder of discriminatory mechanisms that are hidden in the ‘Western’ culture circle. While Michel Foucault (1998 [1976]) demonstrated how the ‘-ism’ had been created within psychiatric and sexological circles, indicating a problem or a disorder, the term in question has never been rethought and re-adjusted even though a similar process has already happened to ‘homosexuality’, ‘heterosexuality’, and, albeit to a lesser extent, ‘transsexualism’ – these have mostly been referred to as ‘homosexuality’, ‘heterosexuality’, and ‘transsexuality’, and the ‘-ism’ ending, both in English and Polish, continues to be used pejoratively only in political and medical contexts. Taking this into account, in both languages I have been promoting the respectful **‘lesbianity’** (lesbijskość) in place of that only available dictionary form; linguistically, the ‘-ity’ (-ość) ending conveys positivity or, in the worst case, neutrality. An important caveat is in order, though – one of my overall objectives has been to reclaim the concept and praxis of lesbian feminisms, modifying them in the ‘Western’ reality and encouraging their emergence for the local needs of the Polish

context⁶. One of the features of the classic lesbian feminism in the ‘West’ was the clinging to, and pride in, the very idea of lesbianism, as well as the identity that comes with this term. The alteration of mine is merely a discursive tool and as such should not be considered an attack on those women’s experiences; I have met many of the outstanding figures and activists of that time, and have nothing but sheer respect for their preferences in this regard. The approach and changes that I am suggesting are an attempt at an even bigger inclusiveness rather than the erasure of those times and experiences. Lesbian feminisms continue to be a crucial site of individual, social, political, and academic struggles for gendered, sexual, and emotional equity.

With all this as a starting point, I am set to draw the attention to non-heterosexual women’s subjectivities, self-identifications, and actual sexual and emotional experiences as opposed to identities that are fixed and defined externally in the one-dimensionality of so-called ‘heterosexuality’, ‘homosexuality’, or ‘bisexuality’. In the move away from identity towards subjectivity, women in general and lesbians in particular cease to be either objects or abjects⁷, but become actual **subjects**. Although my activity revolving around this theme has many facets, this article focuses on the discursive side of things as observed within academia, particularly feminist practice in Poland. This is where the aforementioned women’s and gender studies programmes should come under scrutiny. As I see it, academic feminisms ought to be the site of

1 At which point I should mention that although it is lesbian studies specifically that I represent and am interested in, I have developed the concept of lesbianity and lesbian subjectivity that is symbolic, open, and inclusive of a plethora of emotional and sexual self-identifications that women can develop. Though a full explanation of this sociological and philosophical matter would go beyond the scope of this article, it is vital to understand that this approach is not tantamount to equating lesbians with bisexual women. For more details see e.g. Olasik, 2017.

2 Another one is my objecting to the social implementation of the concept of the ‘lesbian community’. This, however, I shall skip now as irrelevant for the analysis herein. For more details on this theme see Olasik, 2015a or Olasik, 2015b.

3 For a fuller explanation see e.g. Olasik, 2014 or Olasik, 2018b.

4 In particular, see Heather Love’s activity; the lesbian feminist scholar and activist has been considering queerness in terms of sociological methodologies. See: Love and Peltonen, 2017.

5 I always explain how I make it a point to subvert the contingent power relations and categories by exposing their actual roots and character. At the same time, however, I would be unable to communicate intelligibly without these notions. Thus, placing terms such as ‘East’ or ‘West’ in single quotation marks is my way of undermining these and as such is should be considered part of the queer operation I have mentioned. See: Olasik, 2015b and 2018b for fuller elaborations.

6 See my co-operation in this regard with Kath Browne and Julie Podmore, and – most recently – also with Niharika Banerjea and Eduarda Ferreira. See: Browne, Olasik and Podmore, 2016. The other project is underway; our co-edited book will be published in mid 2019 with Zed Books.

7 Julia Kristeva’s term (1982). See also: Olasik, 2015b for a fuller elaboration on these dependencies.

changes towards personal and political inclusivity. However, for the time being they seem to fail in this task, which is why this article offers a somewhat provocative and destabilising insight.

The Discursive Lacks⁸

There seems to be a major misunderstanding regarding the themes of genders and sexualities. Mythically and stereotypically, gender is perceived to be 'that thing' that feminists talk about, while sexuality is known to be gay people's agenda or psychologists' area of expertise. While in some social and political realities – and Poland is an example – gender is said to be connected with the so-called 'homosexual propaganda', which resembles the 19th-century-like logics of inversion (Foucault, 1998 [1976]), the themes of sexuality and gender as notions are still separated and misunderstood in terms of what they really are and represent. This is a huge misunderstanding and as such it should be consistently countered – gender and sexuality are inextricably linked and can never be separated, for their role in the 'Western' culture circle is **to justify and complement each other**; sexual desire has been **superimposed on** what had been conceived of as gender. **By definition, then, gender will be sexual as much as the sexual will be gendered.** In consequence, it does not really make sense to analyse, debate, defend – or speak of – one without the other. Sadly, this is exactly what has been happening in the Polish social and academic arenas.

While it is easier to understand common people's lack of knowledge in societies where no sexual education programmes exist, it is quite disturbing when genders and sexualities

are investigated separately on more specialised levels, i.e. in activism and academia. As it is now, the majority of feminist environments and figures fail to address the question of sexuality at all, generating a vicious circle whereby women's equity is misinterpreted and, thus, restricted. Although I always make it a point to recognise differences in the development of feminist discourses across localities – and thus to have reasonable expectations – I do not think that it matters a great deal with regard to lines of thinking and approaches. Prior to the social and political events of the year 2016 – and contrary to what some tend to say (Lis, 2013) – Poland had not seen a proper feminist movement (Majewska, 2017; Środa, 2009); it is also a discursive and substantial mistake to speak of 'waves' of the Polish feminism⁹. Since womanhood in public and political spheres has been the constant and main theme, with the notion of femininity not even questioned or discussed – and it does resemble what the 'West' knows as the first-wave feminism – sexuality has obviously not had a chance to develop into a theme, too. Therefore, with **heterosexuality** not being mentioned or scrutinised over several decades at all, it is hardly surprising that **no separate lesbian component has ever existed in the Polish social and academic spaces.** As I see it, however, this should be an opportunity for present-day efforts and contributions to think creatively rather than take the current state of affairs for granted and repeat someone else's history by following in the 'Western' footsteps, where 'waves' or divisions had formed one by one before intersectionality in general, and sexuality in particular, was taken into account. Indeed, being in the geographical, political, and social Margin as conceptualised by bell hooks (1989), Poland has an opportunity to

⁹ For my more detailed elaborations on this see: Olasik, 2015a and 2018b.

see through the Centre and re-adjust other realities' experiences, not allowing for old mistakes to occur locally and making use of them instead, leading to a more rapid progress. Feminism is where this capacity for the local dimension and reflexivity should be the greatest and most powerful. This, however, is not the case at all, with gender still being the overwhelmingly dominant and exclusive area of interest of Polish activists and academics.

A Sample of Academic Discourse Analysis

With all that has been said in mind, I would like to further support my case by presenting four of gender studies programmes available in Poland, offering a brief commentary on each of them and proving their inadequacies in providing a truly feminist platform for progress, both socially and academically. The exploration in question is going to be a rudimentary sample, but it is one that reveals problems that led me to pursue more serious semantic field analyses with regard to feminist academic events. It is significant to understand why I purposefully chose to focus on **the list of subjects available**, ignoring some of other variables on the one hand and institutional and political circumstances on the other; these I comment on somewhere else, pointing to what kind of research and quantitative data is needed for a fuller and more comprehensive understanding of the problem. Since a list of subjects provides **the framework** for the whole programme, it seems entirely justified to assess the contents with the use of this information alone. Internal university documentation that features lengthy descriptions and exact contents of the programmes is valuable, but not relevant when it comes to evaluating the overall structure and descriptions that comprise the official programme and that are available to candidates when they choose to

enrol. Another caveat to bear in mind is that even though this particular article describes four programmes only, which may seem insufficient and presumptuous, I had previously explored this theme in depth and the problem in question remains the same even with the number of almost twenty¹⁰. Here and now, however, my purpose is merely **to signal a particular alarming tendency and a repetitive pattern** within the local feminism; it is in this context that a simple list of subjects is revealing and makes it possible to call for caution and reflexivity in building new layers of social struggles in contemporary Poland. On a side note, the programmes I am about to mention here come from the academic year 2017/2018 and the data was gathered at the very beginning of that year¹¹. All the translations of the subjects are mine.

I should start with presenting the programme of the supposedly most professional and popular gender studies in Poland. Run mostly by recognisable and experienced feminists and educators, it has no mention of sexuality-related issues whatsoever; the only subject of interest from the point of view of a lesbian scholar seeking any link to sexuality is the mysteriously protrusive 'introduction to

¹⁰ All this I tried to explore more thoroughly in my doctoral dissertation when devoting many pages to the question of women's and gender studies programmes from almost all over the world.

¹¹ Almost all gender studies programmes in Poland are post-graduate, i.e. one can enrol in them when holding a B.A. or M.A. in any discipline; usually there are no requirements. Post-graduate studies here usually last one year or two years at maximum, and they tend to be treated as a mere addition to a CV or a development of a hobby; in the humanities they rarely give actual qualifications or translate into future possibilities (the case might be slightly different with more technical studies or exact sciences). The GEMMA programme I will next refer to is one exception; it is part of an international Master's programme and as such results in the students obtaining the M.A. degree.

⁸ This section was more fully developed in my doctoral dissertation exclusively. What I offer here is merely a brief glimpse into this subject; hopefully it provides enough encouragement to further attention to the academic state of affairs in this regard.

masculinity studies' (see the list below). While I fully support its existence as the debate on men's experiences of privilege and oppression are invaluable in discussing gendered power relations, I have also learnt that the recent choice to introduce this theme was made at the cost of a 'female sexuality' subject – or at least its elements – which was also under consideration¹². Although this event and its political and institutional circumstances require further investigation, it is regrettable – and ironically symbolic – that a truly progressive move towards the acknowledgment of female sexuality has been hindered by a masculinity-profiled choice. This sort of political and institutional secondary discrimination seems unacceptable. Moreover, it is unclear to me why the programme got deprived of the 'sexuality and gender: biology and culture' subject, which had been part of the studies in the previous academic year. Even though it was only one in almost twenty subjects on the list, it nonetheless offered a link between sexuality and gender, provoking a very basic debate on the implications of this juxtaposition. As it is now, the framework of the allegedly most recognisable gender studies programme in Poland is very one-dimensional and, discursively, not sexual at all, which is questionable due to the reasons described earlier.

Anti-discrimination workshops
Feminist urban studies
Feminist philosophy
Gender theory – main terms and concepts
Psychoanalysis
Law, gender, and discrimination
Economics
Equality politics
The history of women's movements and feminisms in Poland, in Europe, and in the world
Literature and gender
Feminist film criticism
Introduction to masculinity studies

The next programme comes from the Institute of Applied Social Sciences at the University of Warsaw. Its structure is not entirely clear and transparent, which has left me with the timetable of only three subjects; the other three come from the previous academic year and as such offer only a glimpse into what can be expected. The available fact is that the programme enjoys the fame of interdisciplinarity, but this seems to be more theoretical than practical. It is, however, a curious example. The programme features a whole separate subject on the sex work industry; run by Agata Dziuban, PhD, who is an outstanding sociologist and an internationally-acclaimed activist, it will most certainly offer an in-depth professional analysis of female sex workers' status. This, however, stands in stark contrast to the other subjects, which offer no basics regarding the notion of sexuality in contemporary cultures. I fear that the awkwardly professional sex-work-profiled debate will not be fully taken advantage of, since this would require a prior understanding of the inextricability and emergence of gender and sexuality in the first place. This said, I am nonetheless happy that Dziuban was given this chance to introduce the subject and I remain hopeful that the

students will recognise the utmost significance of this theme in spite of its being taken out of the context of more basic social and cultural mechanisms. Other than this, the programme used to offer a historical perspective featuring the motif of queer theory; it is not clear to me how effective this can be provided that no other subjects covered the implications of sexuality a such. While I fully support any chance to introduce this concept to students, it is vital to remember that queer is more of **a consequence** of the construct of sexuality rather than its clarification; therefore, it should not serve as a cultural preface, so to say.

Gender Studies – Institute of Applied Social Sciences, University of Warsaw
Introduction to the question of women's herstories and histories
Gender and crime. Legal, criminological and social analysis
Sex work from the feminist perspective
Culture wars and gender [2016/2017]
The history of gender: Gender/Queer in the history of 20th century [2016/2017]
Gender and new social movements [2016/2017]

Another programme available in Poland, and an important one, is the Erasmus GEMMA programme, offered by the Women's Studies Centre at the University of Lodz – the oldest women's and gender studies centre in Poland. The full name of this rather successful M.A. programme is 'GEMMA Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies in Europe'. Its first semesters offer subjects that are the same for all the centres in Europe and beyond that are part of the programme, while the last semester is adjusted more individually and locally. Although masculinity studies are included as well as it is the only programme in Poland that introduces and addresses the question of intersectionality and race in a more direct manner, sexuality *per se*

still missing and I can only remain hopeful that it is somehow squeezed in the intersectional debates in the class. Altogether, the Centre and its programme stands out as the only one of a truly international and somewhat diverse character, but this is exactly why the lack of an openly sexuality-profiled subject can be disappointing. However, I also believe that the programme's uniqueness (international audience, students with diverse backgrounds and axes of identification, and classes conducted in the English language) makes it possible for the lecturers to adjust the contents of their subjects accordingly, which is, perhaps, a liberty that the other programmes do not enjoy.

Gender Studies – GEMMA programme, University of Lodz
The history of feminism
Feminist theories
Feminist methodologies
Human rights and gender
Introduction to gender in postmodern visual culture
Men and masculinities
Intersectionality and audience analysis in feminist classroom – part 1
Gender and welfare state
Feminist literature and philosophy
Gender representations in advertising
War and imperialism: Postcolonial and feminist perspectives on nationalism
Gender & academic and creative writing
Intersectionality and audience analysis in feminist classroom – part 2
La Frontera and the New Mestiza consciousness: Race, ethnicity and gender at the US-Mexican border
The body in feminist theory and practice

Gender Studies – Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw
<i>Performance studies of word and image in the context of gender studies</i>
Gender politics: history of the term and contemporary strategies of emancipatory movements
Militarism, political violence, and gender. Key debates
Feminist oral history

¹² I highly appreciate Kamila Żukowska's information and comments on this important issue.

The last programme I want to refer to comes from the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń and is relatively young; the first edition took place in the academic year 2011/2012. This one, to my mind, is the best and most thorough and multi-faceted gender studies programme currently available in Poland. First, it features a separate subject on “the core of femininity”, actually considering and questioning the very category of womanhood; this, as I have shown, is already extraordinary. Second, and along the same lines, the sociology of gender is actually made into a separate subject. Run by Beata Bielska, PhD, it is more likely than not to include the questions of the construction of sex and sexuality in general and female sexuality in particular. Other than this, the programme does introduce masculinity studies, too. I am, however, disappointed that the institution got rid of two indispensable and truly professional subjects that had been part of the programme in the previous academic year, namely ‘the ethics of sexuality’ and ‘the social and cultural conditionings of womanhood throughout history’. Impressive as they were, for some reasons they were not selected for the continuation of the programme. This said, I nevertheless believe that this particular programme is the ‘safest’ and best choice for present-day students in Poland, especially since the many subjects available cover various disciplines and seem to be fairly multi-faceted, approaching the matters under scrutiny from a variety of angles and providing more natural intertextual and intersectional grounds for sexuality than the other programmes do. Sadly, this unique post-graduate programme did not run in the academic year 2018/2019, which, as I have been told by the people involved, is hopefully a one-year gap only.

Gender Studies – 2017/2018, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń
Feminism. Main concepts, theories, and controversies
Feminist cultural studies
The core of femininity. Problems and controversies about the notion of ‘woman’
Interpersonal dialogue – psychological and hermeneutical aspects
Universal and European standards of women’s rights protection
Gender in popular culture
Women in public space
Psychology of gender and power
Ethical basics of respect and tolerance
Literary phantasms of gender
Women, Art, Revolution
Masculinities studies
Feminism and social participation. Project-writing workshops
Anti-discrimination workshop 1. Identity, prejudice, discrimination
Anti-discrimination workshop 2. Anti-discrimination activities, gender, and media
Sociology of gender
Women’s movements and feminism in Poland
Gender equality politics in practice

Again, the commentaries I have just offered are too brief for me to be able to cover the problem in depth; instead, I have conceived of this article as an encouragement to reflection and further research into this theme, for even this basic discourse-analysis research shows serious inadequacies with regard to how gender and sexuality are imagined and investigated. I would like to reiterate, then, that, bluntly speaking, **gender must not be introduced and explained without a reference to, and clarification of, the phenomenon of sexuality**. This said, I shall once again emphasise that there are certain limitations to this

sort of a quick analysis, the main one being my exclusive focus on the list of subjects. I agree that, generally speaking, these can frequently be misleading and hide the true essence or objectives of a course, as well as the number of hours per a meeting is ignored this way. I can easily imagine that some of the lecturers do refer to sexuality while covering their otherwise non-sexual subjects. However, this does not solve the dilemma and cannot serve as a justification; if the question of sexuality is hidden and not expressed through the name of a subject, what does it say about its social and academic status and significance? Therefore, I still defend my selection of the simple method; **it is the availability of themes that points to the character of a whole programme and determines one’s decision to enrol**. It is the names of the subjects above all that are available to candidates and prospective students, guiding them when they seek an attractive programme to enrol in, which is why, as I have already pointed out, they were more relevant to this analysis than the internal university documentation would have been. Of course, this theme and research should be continued and supplied with data about the number of hours per subject, the syllabi, literature covered, or the number of students attending these programmes across larger cities in Poland. Interviews with lecturers might also be considered with regard to the actual contents and coverage of particular themes, but all of this would lead to a research project with completely different purposes; it would not cancel the significance of the observations herein as well as the insufficiencies visible in the construction and framework of the programmes, which is what I wished to focus on. Also, a regular update is needed with regard to how the programmes continue to change on a year-to-year basis.

With all these commentaries and caveats in mind, the bottom line is that – at least for

the time being – **gender as represented and discussed in the Polish academic feminism does not seem to be sexual at all** and I believe that I have already explained how and why this tendency points to a major substantial mistake and a discursive misunderstanding. To be fair, the situation is not much different in other localities; I have analysed almost thirty women’s and gender studies programmes from all over the world¹³ and have found only few that can be considered truly emancipatory with regard to several axes of women’s identifications, and that seem to treat gender and sexuality in the same way. On a side note, there are instances of the so-called ‘gender and sexuality studies’, which makes it easier to justify the inclusion of sexuality-related themes, since they emphasise the significance and equality of both components. As I have already clarified, **gender is already sexual by definition**, which is why ‘gender studies’ should not be about gender exclusively. However, I could agree that in the Polish institutional reality putting ‘sexuality’ in a name of a whole programme would be a progressive step, i.e. one that would, perhaps, encourage feminists’ interest in sexuality, translating into the necessity to include it in programmes’ contents in a more open and systematic way.

All in all, it should be clear by now that women’s and gender studies¹⁴ cannot afford to be non-sexual, and yet this is precisely what happens. That said, I strongly emphasise my careful selection of words here – it would be inappropriate to use the word ‘asexual’

¹³ With the exception of South America; the University of Buenos Aires failed to respond to my enquiries. Again, the analysis in question was part of my doctoral dissertation.

¹⁴ Also on a side note, the relationship between women’s studies and gender studies – and its historical character – is irrelevant for the purposes herein.

to describe the contemporary Polish feminism¹⁵, for asexuality is a perfectly legitimate preference and choice, and as such it implies reflexivity and should not be used in a pejorative context. The way that the present-day programmes and activist initiatives and discourses¹⁶ are constructed offers no auto-reflexivity in this regard, which is why I choose to call this feminism non-sexual instead. This is even more disturbing when considering the dynamic character of contemporary changes and recent political events both in 'Western' societies and in Poland; feminist activists have to be present and outspoken, so it should be a great opportunity for the question of sexuality in general, and female sexuality in particular, to emerge. The same is true for debates around race, but, first, this does happen with feminisms in the 'West', while Poland as a monocultural society – and one known for the right-wing overtly national and hostile attitude to non-whiteness – does not seem to develop interest in this theme and opportunity to discuss it (with a notable exception of the aforementioned GEMMA programme). Second, though, the question of race – and the resultant axes of privileges and oppressions – is where a certain extension of gender-

15 Having worked on this subject area with colleagues from other localities, I usually speak of a plurality or multiplicity of feminisms. This, however, is not an adequate phrasing to describe the Polish context, where the one-dimensionality of feminist debates is striking. On a side note, recent abortion debates and Black Protests in Poland are extremely important and valuable, as well as they did fulfil their political role, but so far they have failed to address the question of sexuality itself.

16 Obviously, this article focuses on the academic discourse, but the situation in activism is equally unsatisfactory, with no interest in female sexuality whatsoever. Both in literature and on the grassroots street level, and despite many an opportunity, the question of sexuality – and even the very term – continues to be a taboo. As mentioned above, the Black Protests of 2016 and 2017 provide one example of this phenomenon.

related dynamics emerges. Sexuality, however, is an **ingrained** part of gender, so it does not need an extension. As it is now, however, both feminist activism and academia seem to be involved in a vicious circle, where neither dares to speak the sexual, **depriving the notion of gender of its culturally-designed meanings and potentials**.

With all this in mind, I suggest that what I have recently conceived of as the politics of **sexuality mainstreaming** should be considered as a valid framework across feminisms and academic gender studies programmes. An indirect and somewhat provocative reference to the common and official gender mainstreaming guidelines, the role of sexuality mainstreaming would not be to cancel the importance of the former policy, but, rather, to extend its scope and shift its focus by ensuring that what we came to know as gender does begin to involve the sexuality component for a change, which – as I have shown – should have never been doubted and erased in the first place. With gender remaining the keyword of feminist environments and European policies alike, it is now time to emphasise the proper places and spaces of sexuality within the discourses in question.

Towards Interdisciplinary Lesbian Studies

I have devoted much space to the engaged critique of the current state of affairs regarding the one-dimensionality of Polish feminisms, although once again I acknowledge that it can only be treated as an introduction, an encouragement, and a certain indication of a problem rather than a full analysis, especially since this all needs to be put into the context of other women's and gender studies centres across localities. It is only fair that I should offer a solution or an alternative to the problem I identified. This is where my project of academic

lesbian studies comes, one that would inevitably start with three notions: interdisciplinarity, difference, and geography.

Significantly, Polish academia seems to be rather sceptical as to the idea of transdisciplinary investigations, with the status of mono-disciplinary education being high, as opposed to multi-disciplinary efforts and research. While the 'Western' academia has gained years of experience in bridging gaps, carrying out multi-faceted analyses, and relying on interdisciplinary faculties and projects of a diverse character, Poland does not seem to trust such tendencies. Many scholars trained in a given discipline still cling to the ideal of clear and not blurred lines when it comes to science and research; since this is how they had been trained years ago, it seems that interdisciplinary has not been understood properly and does not have good conditions to develop¹⁷. This is readily visible in sociology¹⁸. Importantly, feminism is a site that should always work across disciplinary divisions, and yet its Polish version rarely goes beyond sociology or philosophy. That being said, lesbian studies are inherently multi-disciplinary, for both womanhood and sexuality permeate – and are the focus of – numerous disciplines, sub-disciplines, fields, and spheres of social and individual life. This, in turn, translates into how

17 Which is likely to deepen in the light of the new national policy, known as 'Ustawa 2.0', that the Ministry of Science and Higher Education implemented in 2018; the sudden and damaging revolution in the whole system precludes the idea of lecturers and researchers working within more than two precisely specified sub-disciplines.

18 See: Kurczewska and Lejzerowicz, 2014 for a single example of a whole volume devoted to the theme of interdisciplinarity; the book offers a collection of articles, some of which question the 'fad', while others dare to accept its potential, but the overall tone points to cautiousness and mistrust. If interdisciplinarity in Poland is considered, it is usually in a rather limited manner, i.e. mainly in terms of a bridge between sociology and philosophy specifically.

multi-dimensional the task of such a university programme or faculty needs to be. Indeed, I have devised of a whole separate programme that will hopefully be considered as an actual university module as soon as possible. Since I am unable to share it here¹⁹, I intend to present it conceptually and rather generally; this should be interpreted as both the conclusion of this paper and the invitation to a more inclusive approach and reflexivity on the part of feminist agendas in Poland. Above all, the interdisciplinarity of the programme I have in mind involves its covering a wide variety of areas, such as knowledge production, reflection on the role of language, cross-cultural analyses of genders and sexualities, feminist epistemologies, human geography, post-colonial experiences, rural studies, the role of social movements, story-telling as opposed to truth-telling, the question of Anglo-American hegemony, art, literary studies²⁰, or women in physics and other exact sciences. These, of course, are to be explored through proper reading materials²¹ as well as distinct and more spontaneous discussions. Intertextual (and intersectional) as any project of lesbian studies should undoubtedly be, the emphasis will be placed on difference, with the concept of a 'lesbian community' being adequately addressed, challenged, subverted, and replaced

19 Being the actual objective and conclusion of my doctoral dissertation, it has been endorsed in professional reviews and as such awaits the official publication and institutional initiative.

20 See: Wilton, 1995 for a brilliant and inspiring analysis in this regard. One outstanding example of possible interventions into the *status quo* of literary interpretations is when the author asks, "[I]s the dyke's *Orlando* a different book from the homophobe's *Orlando*, and how is that difference significant?" (Wilton, 1995, p. 118.)

21 Sadly, many of them are available in the English language only, which begs for rapid professional translations that would counter the Anglophone hegemony in science in general and sexuality studies in particular.

with a proposition of a multiplicity of dialogic lesbian movements and initiatives²².

What all this comes down to is the emergence of a multiplicity of lesbian feminisms, which, again, is no clear-cut issue. In more 'Western' activist and academic realities, the emphasis should be placed on the significance of plurality, which, as I have already mentioned, is what my international cooperation involves. Locally, however, what Poland needs is **any** lesbian feminist awareness to develop²³. This has recently begun to take place with the boldness and multi-facetedness of the 'Creative Feminine Tandem' as well as the newly established SISTRUM Association, both based in Warsaw²⁴. It is regrettable, however, that no example to follow comes from the academia, where recognisable feminist figures are active, inviting the chance for the translation of professional knowledges of sexuality into the public life and awareness. Sadly, at least for now **no interest in female sexual subjectivities is visible**, let alone a special focus. The lesbian studies programme that I have conceived of is to be a highly specialised and academically scrutinised platform for research and educational purposes above all. It would hopefully encourage a difference-profiled lesbian-feminist line of thinking, offering protection from the more unacceptable mistakes of the 'Western' past, i.e. clinging to the idea of the almost mystical 'lesbian identity' to such an extent that transphobia and bi-phobia were common among the communities. A new approach will require a change of perspec-

tives, too. This is where I promote the field of human geography, with feminist geographies, geographies of sexualities, and also lesbian geographies as its substantial parts. The major discipline of human geography is non-existent in the Polish academic and institutional realities; it is, thus, hardly surprising that the latter sub-fields have not been taken up by Polish geographers either. Though the spatial and structural constraints of this article do not allow me to describe all the intricacies and dependencies behind these areas of expertise – all of which emerged in the UK – I shall refer to key authors and representatives, namely Kath Browne²⁵, Jon Binnie²⁶, David Bell²⁷, Gill Valentine (2001), David T. Evans (1993), or Diane Richardson (2000 and 2017). Curiously, they seem to have bridged the gap between geography and sociology, leading to interdisciplinarity in the most natural way. Occupying the role of, among others, a geographer of sexuality, I have been involved with the above-mentioned fields for several years now²⁸; I cannot stress enough how crucial it is to incorporate these perspectives into gender-and-sexuality studies in general, and the reflection on female sexualities in particular. As I see it, mature and properly adjusted gender studies is a site where it could eventually happen.

Conclusion

The purpose of this short article was to point to a dangerous tendency within present-day academic feminist theory and practice in Poland, where modifications and alterations are urgently needed for the role of sexuality to be acknowledged and visibilised (Olasik, 2018a). Of course, the question of gender

25 See: Browne, Lim and Brown, 2007; Browne and Nash, 2009.

26 See: Bell and Binnie, 2000.

27 See: Bell and Valentine, 1995.

28 See: Olasik, 2017 and 2018b for most accurate descriptions.

studies is just one of the sites to be scrutinised, but it is the major one; these programmes **represent and embody** academic feminism and as such have the most profound effect on its whole profile, which is why they require a discursive and practical intervention. This aside, the praxis of lesbian studies can additionally aid the task of 'sexualising' contemporary gender debates by encouraging personal, social, and academic reflexivity on a plethora of sexual and emotional auto-creations with regard to femininity. It is only then that a sort of lesbian-feminist awareness can emerge on the institutional level and be developed into so much more than several people's interest in American manifestoes from the 1980s²⁹. Although I tend to repeat that the classic lesbian feminism was **the** greatest era of lesbian visibility and creativity due to the proliferation and omnipresence of various forms of the written word³⁰, I also make it a point to promote a reasonable continuation of that social agenda, i.e. one that would be based on respectful accommodation of differences on the one hand and enquiries into the many dimensions of lesbian **citizenships** on the other. Pursuing the question of who a Polish lesbian citizen is has been a theme that I came to recognise through the geographical dimension of my sociological activity, and one that I will be developing in the most foreseeable future. However, addressing this matter requires substantive and thematic changes within the structure and environment of gender and women's studies, for without their support non-heterosexual women continue to be sidelined, while feminism remains one-dimensional, heteronormative, and divisive. While similar interventions are necessary

29 A direct reference to niche attempts at translating and discussing classic lesbian-feminist texts in the 1990s.

30 For elaboration see: Olasik, 2015a and 2017.

when it comes to the activist side, I believe in the power of feminist academia to encourage and drive grass-roots initiatives and, above all, knowledge production³¹. It is, therefore, only through a complete and thorough revision of Polish feminist tools and agendas that a full extent of sexual and emotional subjectivities can finally be included in what is now a socially dynamic and politically hectic locality. It will also be the moment when, both discursively and socially, lesbian women³² can become actual **subjects**. ☺

Marta Olasik's area of expertise is lesbian studies, which she reflects on from the perspectives of the sociology of knowledge and geographies of sexualities primarily. Her efforts concentrate on re-introducing the component of sexuality into feminism in general and academic analyses of gender in particular. Her PhD dissertation is a pioneering interdisciplinary conceptualisation of lesbian subjectivities (due to be published in both languages) and aims at introducing a proper separate lesbian-studies discourse into the Polish academia as well as promoting the branch of human geography. The next step for Dr Olasik will be to conduct proper empirical research into the question of lesbian subjectivities in Poland. Her international academic activity is extensive and includes the cooperation with prominent geographers of sexualities

31 The activism-academia binary divide is an artificial one and I tend to challenge and subvert it. This, however, goes beyond the scope of this article, which is why I am using these terms only conventionally and in their simplest meanings.

32 See Zita 1992 for a glimpse into this theme. Although I have also spoken of male lesbians, too, as my initial plan for PhD research was to conduct semi-structured interviews with 'biological men' who self-identify as lesbians. My encounter with geographers of sexualities made me realise how futile this sort of work would be in a social and academic space that has never seen a distinct lesbian component in the first place; this is where I decided to create conceptual bases for academic lesbian studies in the first place.

22 This, obviously, requires a proper explanation. See: Olasik, 2015a and 2018b. Also, Judith Butler's "coalitional politics" (1990, pp. 19–20) is a helpful concept here.

23 See: Browne and Olasik, 2016 for an introduction to the idea of the classic mainstream lesbian feminism.

24 The full Polish names are, respectively, 'Damski Tandem Twórczy' and 'Stowarzyszenie Sistrum – Przestrzeń Kultury Lesbijskiej'.

in the attempt to generate a plurality of lesbian feminisms; she has also given a seminar for post-docs and senior academics in the International Gender Studies Centre at the University of Oxford. Her general objective is to promote an intertextual attitude, where lesbianity (sic!) is an open field of possibilities for emotional and sexual self-creation.

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Studia nad podmiotowością lesbijską jako sposób przeciwdziałania nieseksualnym feminizmom w Polsce

Abstrakt

Artykuł ten jest refleksją nad obecną sytuacją studiów nad seksualnością, a szczególnie stanem rzeczy dotyczącym reprezentacji kobiet nieheteroseksualnych we współczesnym świecie akademii i w feminizmach. Specjalizując się w studiach nad podmiotowością lesbijską, z jednej strony staram się ustanowić odrębny dyskurs *lesbian studies* w polskiej nauce, a z drugiej chcę rozpowszechnić metodę interdyscyplinarną jako środek do zaszczepienia lesbijskich feminizmów, które byłyby odpowiednio zmodyfikowane i dostosowane do lokalnych potrzeb. Obroniwszy poświęconą temu rozprawę doktorską, w niniejszym artykule skoncentruję się na jednej z jej części, mianowicie na tej dotyczącej problemu nieadekwatności współczesnych studiów *gender*. Choć ogólnie moja działalność plasuje się w obrębie socjologii seksualności, zazwyczaj konceptualizuję zagadnienia mnie interesujące przez pryzmat socjologii wiedzy i geografii człowieka, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem geografii feministycznych i geografii seksualności. Mając to na uwadze, zamierzam dokonać pobieżnego przeglądu kilku współczesnych programów studiów kobiecych i/lub *gender* w Polsce po to, by wykazać zarówno ich niezdolność do radzenia sobie z kobiecą seksualnością, jak i, w konsekwencji, ich symboliczne i dosłowne wymazywanie lesbijskości. Niniejsza pobieżna analiza stanowi oczywiście jedynie początek dyskusji, ponieważ prezentuje tylko próbkę wysiłków eksploracyjnych w temacie feminizmów akademickich, lecz jest to analiza, która ujawnia pewne niepokojące tendencje.

Słowa kluczowe: studia lesbijskie, socjologia wiedzy, studia gender, geografie seksualności, lesbijski feminizm.



Agnès Varda amidst Images Sensuous Theory and Strategies of Resistance in Feminist Cinema

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Abstract

Sensuous theory has enriched the way in which we now analyze the multisensory film image as well as the embodied experience of the film viewer. Questions about the corporeality and sensuousness of the director, however, are addressed much less frequently from this perspective. Yet it is precisely this aspect that strikes me as particularly interesting, as it allows us to revisit the issue of the creative strategies employed by women in the cinema, and to pose questions about the meaning and status of the sensuous involvement of the female director in the production of her film. Does her corporeality, her physiological and sensory experience affect how the character are created, how the world is depicted, or, more significantly, the very matter of the film image? Can this involvement also become a conscious tactic of resistance against the dominant narrative and visual structures of "male cinema"? Taking these questions as my point of departure, I focus on the film of Agnès Varda *The Beaches of Agnès* (*Les plages d'Agnès*, 2008), which may be regarded as a statement that is just as personal and self-referential as it is possible to universalize. Varda uses the film as a way to examine her own life and art in the context of the history of cinema in the latter half of the 20th century, paying particular attention to the French New Wave, auteur cinema, independent film, and politically and socially engaged cinema. In *The Beaches of Agnès Varda* reiterates questions about her own status as a female director, accentuating the corporeal, sensuous, and affective connections with the film image, filmed objects, people, and places, the film crew, and, ultimately, the cinema as such.

Keywords:

[Agnès Varda](#), [Laura U. Marks](#), [Vivian Sobchack](#), [female film directors](#), [women's cinema](#), [feminist film theory](#), [sensuous theory](#), [auteur cinema](#), [French New Wave](#).

Sensuous theory has enriched the way in which we now analyze the multisensory film image as well as the embodied experience of the film viewer. Questions about the corporeality and sensuousness of the director, however, are addressed much less frequently from this perspective. Yet it is precisely this aspect that strikes me as particularly interesting, as it allows us to revisit the issue of the creative strategies employed by women in the cinema, and to pose questions about the meaning and status of the sensuous involvement of the female director in the production of her film. Taking these questions as my point of departure, I focus on the film of Agnès Varda *The Beaches of Agnès* (*Les plages d'Agnès*, 2008). Varda uses the film as a way to examine her own life and art in the context of the history of cinema in the latter half of the 20th century and to analyze her own status as a female director, accentuating the corporeal, sensuous, and affective connections with the cinema as such.

Sensuous theory – a perspective developed intensively over the past two decades by female scholars such as Vivian Sobchack, Laura U. Marks, Linda Williams, and Martine Beugnet, a salient fact in the context of this discussion – is a response to the crisis of oculo-centric theories, which rely on the conviction that, in the process of perceiving the film image, the dominant sense is that of sight. Setting aside their relevant differences, both psychoanalytic film theory and apparatus theory emphasized the viewer's entanglement in the visual, symbolic, and ideological structures constructed by cinema. The spectator is perceived as fundamentally passive and subservient to cinematic scopical regimes that are seen as nullifying or suspending any individual – particularly sensual and affective – ways of interacting with the film image. Moreover, sensuous theory can also be regarded as a critical yet subtle attempt to test the feminist film theory

of the 1970s, a substantial part of which was built – in the early writings of Laura Mulvey, for example – around the problematic status of the gaze in cinema and the fetishistic and voyeuristic perceptual schemes it provoked.

In place of these scopical categories, sensuous theory calls for us to consider the multisensory status of both the cinema as a medium and the film image, as well as the perception of the viewer her – or himself. From this perspective, the image is there not just to be viewed, and the viewer is not merely exposed to overpowering visual (and auditory) stimuli. The interests of sensuous theory thus revolve around the bodies of both the film and the viewer; the sense that emerges as the most interesting and worthy of appreciation is that of touch. Laura U. Marks employs in this context the notion of haptic visuality, which is founded on the premise that even if the film image – with the notable exception of certain experimental films – remains essentially beyond the physical touch of the viewer, it is still possible to convey haptic sensations via the image, and, furthermore, that certain types of images can make the spectators's eyes function synesthetically, in a sense: not just as a visual organ, but as a tactile one (Marks, 2000). This is by no means an attempt to replace the dominance of one sense with that of another; rather, the point is to appreciate their coexistence in the viewer's sensual perception of the image. In this theory, looking is presented as an experience, while the experienced – or multisensorially perceived – image is depicted as dense, complex, and affecting different senses simultaneously. Specifying and elaborating the nature of this expanded cinematic experience, Vivian Sobchack writes: “[...] we do not experience any movie only through our eyes. We see and comprehend and feel films with our entire bodily being, informed by the full history and carnal knowledge of our acculturated sensorium” (Sobchack, 2004, p. 63). It is

important therefore to consider more than just the particular sensibilities of the viewer, who, after all, may experience varying sensitivity to a range of sensory stimuli. We must also constantly account for the cultural and historical conditioning of our perceptive apparatus. The experience of the cinema is thus as subjective as it is intersubjective, and the film image is not just ontologically multisensorial, it is also entangled in a web of socio-cultural and ideological relations.

What is more, the scholars mentioned above have paid particular attention to the peculiar nature of the female spectator, posing questions about the way sexual and gender differences as well as the social and cultural context affect a person's perception of a film, and about the sensuous viewing strategies (including subversive and emancipatory ones) chosen and adopted by women in the cinema. Yet it seems that the shift towards greater reflection on the status of the image and the spectator has drawn attention away from questions about the status of the filmmaker, the male or female director. It is true that, in reconstructing the central premises of sensuous theory, Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener observe that “the intersubjective communication in the cinema between spectator, film and film-maker is predicated upon and enabled by shared structures of embodied experience that permits the perception of experience and the experience of perception in the first place” (Elsaesser, Hagener, 2010, p. 117). Yet one can hardly resist the impression that, in the scholars' subsequent discussion as well as in Sobchack and Marks, the relevance of the final element of this three-sided relationship is somewhat diminished. Of course, the analyses proposed by Sobchack and Marks typically account for the position of the director, but they do so from the creative more than the corporeal angle. This position is usually considered inasmuch as it directly affects the form of the

film image and, by extension, the relationship with the viewer. There are still some significant questions to pose concerning the corporeality and sensuousness of the director, especially concerning the meaning and status of the sensuous involvement of the female director in the production of her film. Does her corporeality, her physiological and sensory experience affect how the characters are created, how the world is depicted, or, more significantly, the very matter of the film image? Can this involvement also become a conscious tactic of resistance against the dominant narrative and visual structures of “male cinema”? Does it permit her to more fully express herself and specify her own position vis-à-vis a particular film and the history of cinema in general? And, finally, is the perception of these films by the female viewer dependent on a perceptible and definable exchange of sensory stimuli, on some particular corporeal involvement that can be considered at once bonding and empowering?

Examining the category of *auteurship* in film from the perspective of sensuous theory might allow us to overcome, or at least somewhat mitigate, the impasse in which *auteur* theory finds itself, while also providing an opportunity to reconsider the strategies of “women's cinema” and “feminist cinema.” Despite the enormous and enduring popularity of the *auteur* as a category among film critics and audiences at large, it has undoubtedly been in serious crisis since the turn of the 1960s and 70s. The ostensible neutrality (or even naturalness) of *auteurship*, along with its inherent individualism and idealism, have all been the subject of criticism from a number of perspectives, from psychoanalytic film theory, apparatus theory, semiotics, and postmodern theories to film genre theory and feminist theory itself; it is this final case that seems most interesting and unapparent.

In his 2001 book *Le cinéma d'auteur, une vieille lune?*, René Prédal briefly yet astutely

points out a certain crucial paradox in feminist theory (and practice) in cinema: “the pioneering field of Women’s Studies in the late 1960s only began to speak up for female *auteurs* when the concept of the *auteur* found itself in crisis” (Prédal, 2007, p. 39). The initial paradox in this case is that it is necessary to deconstruct or even expose the category of the *auteur* as strictly tied to modernist notions of the exceptional and dominant position of the artist, and as associated with a male-centric cultural paradigm, while concurrently reinforcing and specifying the position of women in the realm of art (including film art) and considering the creative strategies that would be most appropriate for them. The consequences of this observation are explained with great precision by Ginette Vincendeau, who likewise frames them as a paradox in the direct context of French women’s cinema: “Given that the model for the *auteur* is still the individual genius, or at least the artist driven by ‘internal necessity’ towards self-expression, this has had the paradoxical result of pushing French women directors into heightened individualism on the one hand and alignment with male ‘colleagues’ on the other” (Vincendeau, 1987, p. 9).¹ Thus, when she produces a film

as a woman, the director risks either reinforcing the individualistic model associated with modernist and avant-garde cinema, or acquiescing to the strategies and positions imposed by mainstream cinema, with its resources and narrative schemes. In either circumstance, the “female perspective” or “women’s *auteurship*” may be blurred or intercepted by film production models that are strongly anchored in the history of cinema.

It is my assumption, however, that sensuous theory provides the tools that allow the issue of female directorial strategies to be examined from yet another angle, one that avoids reintroducing the entire complex of meanings and notions associated with *auteur* cinema. At the same time, it does so without rejecting the achievements of narratology, which has, in a way, undermined the status of the author, relegating him or her to the position of just one of the literary or visual text’s many narrative instances. And, finally, it avoids the use of the quasi-universal but essentially highly problematic category of “women’s cinema.” Focusing on the corporeal, multisensory creative process allows us to reconcile the subjective and intersubjective perspectives. While *auteur* theory grants privileged status to the *auteur* within the cultural distribution model and presents individualism as a non-negotiable value in and of itself, sensuous theory allows us to focus on the deeply intimate process of interacting with images and, through them, with the viewers. Naturally, what we encounter here is a different appreciation of the individual or private; this individualism, however, is one that is developed and multidimensionally negotiated, simultaneously constructed and deconstructed in the process of creation, rather than granted and assumed as a sort of ready-made template. By analyzing the practices of female directors through the lens of sensuous theory, we can also observe how they problematize their own *auteurship*

and how they critically analyze the narrative structures of their own films, resisting any sort of ready generalization.

An excellent example of the use of sensuous theory, among other theories, to analyze the creative strategies of female directors is the book *Gendered Frames, Embodied Cameras*, by Cybelle H. McFadden, which discusses the films of Agnès Varda, Chantal Akerman, Dominique Cabrera, Sophie Calle, and Maiwenn. The scholar precisely lays out the purpose of her work in the introduction where she declares that her aim was to show that the practices of self-representation and reflexivity are crucial for French female filmmakers, since they create a different representational space that allows filmmakers to craft film bodies and to establish a new conceptual framework of seeing, perceiving, and being. “[...] they each create a cinematic female body heretofore unseen. Once the visibility of the female filmmaker occurs, then claims to authority may be more easily gained, since her known presence calls for recognition of a wider range of speaking and looking positions. Moreover, if a certain materiality of the body suggests dependence on artistic intervention, then the need for women’s widespread claim to artistic authority is more pressing than we imagined” (McFadden, 2014, pp. 28–29). We discover that the strategies of resistance proposed by female filmmakers are intended to do more than just inscribe their work into the theoretical and historical framework of the dominant cinematic discourse, to place the directors somewhere along its margins or boundaries, but to effect a radical reorganization or shifting of the framework and to reject the logic of the privileged center and eccentric (“independent”) periphery. This end can be reached, according to the author, through such means as accounting for corporeality and sensuality in the creative process, proposing a new relationship to the film image, as well as the

redefinition, in a cinematic context, of such categories as autobiography, self-portrait, and self-representation.

Taking as my point of departure the conclusions presented by McFadden, I wish to focus on the work of Agnès Varda, specifically on a single film in her oeuvre, namely, the 2008 picture *The Beaches of Agnès*, which seems characteristic of the processes that are of interest to me here. In terms of both its content and form – its use of narrative methods, editing techniques, and authorial commentary, its complex autobiographical and self-representation strategies, and the multisensory imagery it employs – the film may be regarded as the culmination of Varda’s entire creative path, as a statement that is just as personal and self-referential as it is possible to universalize in the context of film history. Varda uses the film as a way to examine her own life (private and professional – these two levels are intentionally intertwined) and art (not just her films) in the context of the history of cinema in the latter half of the 20th century, paying particular attention to the French New Wave, *auteur* cinema, independent film, and politically and socially engaged cinema. More importantly, though, in *The Beaches of Agnès* Varda reiterates questions that resurface throughout her work: questions about her own status as a female director, accentuating the corporeal, sensuous, and affective connections with the film image, filmed objects, people, and places, the film crew, and, ultimately, the cinema as such.

In one sequence in *The Beaches of Agnès*, Varda reminisces about one of her most acclaimed films, *Vagabond* (*Sans toit ni loi*, 1985), and at once about the events that provided important context for the movie and the filmmaker’s personal life, namely, the turbulent and effective protests staged by French women in the mid-1970s in their struggle for the right to abortion. The director’s voice-over

1 Tellingly, Laura U. Marks also notices the risks stemming from individualism, including those that affect women’s practices in the broad field of avant-garde cinema. In the introduction to her book *The Skin of Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses*, she observes that while her theory of representation may eventually be used to examine various areas of cinema, her departing position is to concentrate on intercultural cinema. She explains her motivations thusly: “A related difference between intercultural cinema and other kinds of experimental and mainstream cinema is that it stresses the *social* character of embodied experience: the body is a source not just of individual but of cultural memory. Consequently, my discussion of embodiment and sense perception is not wholly applicable to works in the individualistic tradition of avant-garde cinema. For the same reason, it cannot be imported wholesale to describe commercial cinema” (Marks, 2000, p. xiii).

commentary, which touches upon the deeper reasons for the protests as well as her own motivations, is paired with scenes in which the main character appears to share Varda's emotions: "I tried to be a joyful feminist, but I was very angry." This statement could be seen as a very succinct and astute observation on Varda's involvement in feminism, which she has consistently problematized directly in her own work and interviews, and for which she has drawn frequent criticism. Varda describes herself as a feminist who has been involved in the struggle for women's rights since her early youth, someone who is conscious of the social, cultural, and economic status of women, but who intentionally follows her intuition, sometimes contrary to the slogans and methods of action adopted by second-wave feminism. For this reason her work, particularly that of the 1970s, has elicited noticeably mixed responses from feminists, depending on the interpretation of each new film or other creative endeavor. Varda in one interview sums up her ambiguous, historically fluctuating position in the field of feminist cinema, observing that she often felt like a ping-pong ball being knocked back and forth by supporters and opponents of the women's movement (Quart, 1986–1987, p. 6).

While Varda's status as a feminist filmmaker might still be a matter of contention, one can hardly question the fact that her work offers a conscious and multidimensional examination of the problematic status of the woman as director and director as woman. Her public statements and films consistently demonstrate that these two aspects and social roles remain, in her experience, tightly and often painfully intertwined. What is more, neither role can be defined in terms of an abstract or universal category, as a set of ready-made norms and standard operating procedures that must simply be accepted. Each is deeply embodied and lies at the heart of any attempt

at self-definition and self-determination. In an interview given in 1975, Varda states: "It's difficult to find one's identity as woman: in one's social dealings, in one's private life and in one's body. This search for identity has a meaning for a filmmaker: I try to film as a woman" (Varda, 2014, p. 72). Later in the same interview, she explains: "For me, to be a woman is first of all to have the body of a woman. A body which isn't cut up into a bunch of more or less exciting pieces, a body which isn't limited to the so-called erogenous zones (as classified by men), a body of refined zones..." (Varda, 2014, p. 74). In place of the general and nebulous category of "women's cinema," Varda proposes one which she calls "woman's cinema," which would have to be tightly linked to the experience of the self as a woman and the experience of one's own body as a woman's body. This is a vivid illustration of the dynamic tension between radical individualism (there's no such thing as a cinema shared by all women) and the deliberate emphasis of community bonds (the individual body of the woman is always a field of battle among external expectations, the subjective experience of one's own sensuousness and physicality and some general "woman's bodily condition").

The matter of being a female filmmaker is obviously tied to the problem of *auteurship*. Varda is forced not only to define herself through the person she is as a female director, but also through her choice of authorial strategies, which, in turn, are grounded in the context in which she debuted, that is, in the milieu of the French New Wave at the turn of the 1950s and 60s, which remained unquestioningly attached to the politics of authorship. Delphine Bénézet, in her book devoted to the cinema of Agnès Varda, describes her struggles in this field as "performing authorship," emphasizing that every effort made by the filmmaker to define her status as a film

auteur is openly subversive in nature (Bénézet, 2014, pp. 60–68). *The Beaches of Agnès* provides examples of the ostensibly contradictory techniques Varda uses to simultaneously reinforce and undermine the position of the *auteur*. We see this intriguing oscillation in the very opening sequence of the film. Varda begins by addressing the viewers directly: "I'm playing the role of a little old lady, pleasantly plump and talkative, telling her life story", then distances herself from her own role as the director, stressing that she is first and foremost a character of her own invention, one as fictional ("I'm playing the role of a little old lady") as she is real ("telling her life story"). Yet she shatters this construct in the next sentence when she adds, "Others who intrigue me, motivate me, make me ask questions, disconcert me, fascinate me." The semblance of subjectivity put on for the purpose of the film at once disperses into intersubjectivity, with the visual layer of the film underscoring the event. We initially see Varda walking alone on a beach, only to be joined a moment later by the film crew, whom she addresses, introducing each name and face to the viewers. In a subsequent shot we see her again, filmed from behind, as she sits in a director's chair with the name "Agnès V." written on it in bold white lettering. Performing authorship, in this case, involves assuming certain roles (that of an old lady, a director, an actress in her own film) and defining them in a manner that is deliberately incomplete; Varda is the author, but only when she is accompanied by other people, who not only participate in making the film with her, but also create her as a filmmaker. Even the lettering on the chair appears to be more than just an afterthought: her last name is replaced with an initial (it's worth noting that only her first name is mentioned in the title), which prevents us from fully identifying her and is more of a conventional symbol indicating her role on the film set.

Varda skilfully plays with the notions of *auteurial* genius throughout her work, and this film is no exception; she emphasizes in interviews and in one of the scenes in *The Beaches of Agnès* that she embarked on her journey into the film world as a complete amateur and that, unlike the entire generation of cinephiles who formed the New Wave, she knew nothing about the cinema and had literally seen no more than ten films. One naturally gets the impression that these pronouncements reveal a hint of coyness (is it not the ultimate testament to her genius that, as a person wholly unfamiliar with the history of cinema, Varda made the very film that launched the New Wave, namely *La Pointe Courte* from 1954?) and subtle sarcasm leveled at the masters of *auteur* cinema. Delphine Bénézet mentions another subversive strategy employed by the filmmaker: the use of cartoonized alter-egos in her film projects and performances. Recently these surrogate figures have even surpassed the boundaries of her artistic practice; Varda, who received a honorary Oscar as a first woman film director in history and whose film *Faces Places* (co-directed with the French street artist JR) was nominated for the Academy Award for best documentary, had life-size photographic cut-outs made for the nomination announcement gala. JR and the attending journalists had their pictures taken with the figure. This amusing and ostensibly innocuous gesture revealed once again the ambiguity of performing authorship; Varda managed simultaneously to distance herself from this utterly *auteurial* distinction (curtly dismissing it in one interview: "I'm outdated, so they really don't know what to do with me") and to plant herself (or, rather, one of her alter-egos) in the center of the film world's attention.

These few examples are sufficient to show that, in Varda's case, her struggle with authorship often assumes a very corporeal form, relating directly to her experience of the

body and its place in the visual and narrative structures of her films as well as the real world. Corporeality resurfaces in her work in many ways and at many levels. Even the category of *cinécriture* (cinematic writing) that is so central to Varda's film theory is defined by the filmmaker as "not illustrating a screenplay, not adopting a novel, not getting the gags of a good play, not any of this. I have fought so much since I started, since *La Pointe Courte*, for something that comes from emotion, from visual emotion, sound emotion, feeling, and finding a shape for that, and a shape which has to do with cinema and nothing else" (Quart, 1986–1987, p. 4). In her search for the appropriate form of cinematic expression for emotions, in forging sensuous experiences into film images, Varda forms through her films a particularly intense relationship with the viewers – a bond that is not exclusively or primarily intellectual, but rather one that is almost physical. Bénézet points out specific techniques that serve to reinforce that corporeal bond: the direct gaze into the camera, an offscreen voice or intertitles and the bodies of the people on screen (Bénézet, 2014, p. 123). Later, in discussing the short 1984 film *7p., cuis., s. de b., ... à saisir*, she writes: "In the film as a whole, Varda refuses to separate body and mind and interpellates her audience through emotions and sensations. In all the scenes where we face the body in its variety of shapes and states, as it is, for instance, hurting, thinking, moving, loving, the director reminds us of cinema's materiality and she demonstrates its potential to jolt us into thinking" (p. 135).

To put Bénézet's observations in general terms, we might say that in Varda's work corporeality is a medium through which she simultaneously creates herself as a director and a woman and forges a strong bond with both the film image (in the sense of a body of film) and with the bodies of the spectators. It is possible to list many examples of films that

illustrate how Varda problematizes the body as both the subject and the matter of film; this is proven perhaps most fully and most heart-breakingly in the 1991 film *Jacquot de Nantes*, which she dedicated to her dying husband, Jacques Demy. However, my focus here will be the movies that demonstrate how Varda adjusted to, learned, and constructed her own body in her films.

In the 1975 film *Daguerréotypes*, Varda, at the time a young mother, resolves to take a closer look at her immediate environment and the people around her, the inhabitants of Rue Daguerre in Paris, where she has lived and kept an office since the mid 1950s. She explains in one interview the process of producing the film, making references to corporeal categories as well as her own emotional and physical experiences: "So this time there was no question of going anywhere. I had one year to complete the project. I was a bit stuck at home. So I told myself that I was a good example of women's creativity – always a bit stuck and suffocated by home and motherhood. So I wondered what could come of these constraints. Could I manage to restart my creativity from within these limitations? Ultimately this didn't strike me as so very different from dealing with other kinds of limitations, such as the constraints of making a commissioned film. [...] This time I would come face to face with a limitation that must be confronted by many other women. [...] So I set out from this idea, from this fact that most women are stuck at home. And I attached myself to my hearth. I imagined a new umbilical cord. I had a special eighty-meter electric cable attached to the electric box in my house. I decided I would allow myself that much space to shoot *Daguerréotypes*. I could go no further than the end of my cable. I would find everything I needed within that distance and never venture further. That gave my film a special meaning for me in addition to its documentary

aspect" (Varda, 2014, p. 65). Once again, we see how Varda treads a fine line between the personal, strongly intimate experience and the experience of maternity shared by many women. We see how she negotiates between being a woman and a filmmaker, each time emphasizing the entire bodily and sensuous equipment with which this role has outfitted her. And finally, as Katherine Ince points out: "Varda's use of an electrical cable to measure out the maximum distance her camera could travel points wittily to the centrality of her own maternal body to her film-making, but just as importantly, emphasizes the materiality and materialization of filmic space" (Ince, 2013, p. 611).

Yet the film that is truly groundbreaking in terms of the present context is the two-part project titled *The Gleaners and I* (*Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse*, 2000) and *The Gleaners and I: Two Years Later* (*Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse... deux ans après*, 2002), in which Varda portrays individuals who, for reasons ranging from individual passion to the difficult circumstances in their lives, have turned to gathering. In the course of making the first film, the director realizes that she, too, is a *glaneuse* – a collector of things and images, of people and their stories. At the same time, she is compelled to face her own body – an aging body, as she repeatedly points out – as both a subject of the film and the content of the image. In one interview, Varda admits she feared the inevitable narcissism that comes with turning the camera on oneself, but also felt like she wanted to be alone with herself in doing so. She adds: "And I was speaking to myself, like taking notes, filming myself speaking to the little camera and there was narration I'd improvised when I was filming my hand with one hand. And I felt a little pleasure of being the filmer and the filmed, I mean how could I say that one hand could film the other one. But like explaining our whole life like we want to be part of

it, we want to be the subject but we want to be the object, we want everything. And I felt every pleasure. Filming one hand filming the other one, it closes a kind of circle" (Varda, 2014, p. 189). Being at once the filming subject and filmed object enabled Varda to more fully feel her own corporeality – an experience from which she derived new sensual pleasure. Yet the deliberate filming of oneself always leads back to questions about the relationship between the author and her own work, an issue the filmmaker so interestingly explores in *The Beaches of Agnès*.

The history of film abounds with directors appearing in their own films. Perhaps the most frequently analyzed example is that of Alfred Hitchcock, who would famously step in front of the camera for a single shot in his films, a custom that later inspired many New Wave filmmakers. But this practice can also take much more elaborate forms, to the extent that it begins to encroach upon the diegesis of the film, forming an unexpected link between the fictional film world and reality. Magdalena Podsiadło, in her book about autobiographic strategies in film, points out that such techniques are never neutral or apparent, and, crucially, that they make it impossible to unambiguously determine the ultimate status of the work. Only one example of this corporeal link between the filmmaker and his/her filmic oeuvre is his/her appearance in the film's diegesis which makes it possible to leave an embodied trace of oneself in the film. "It is worth noting, however, that this presence is illusory, as it, too, is subject to 'textification' [...]. Regardless of whether the figure of the director is inscribed into the diegesis of the film or actors are used in his stead, the filmmaker is still absent. The author becomes, in the picture, a figure of his own self. Entangled in a web of references to other signs, his meaning can no longer be controlled" (Podsiadło, 2013, p. 71). *The Beaches of Agnès* can be viewed in this

context as just such a web: a tangled system of signs and references in whose mobile and elusive center the embodied and sensuous figure of the female filmmaker is constantly at play.

Agnès Varda likes to describe the genre of her films, which are in fact difficult to classify within any familiar categories, as “subjective documentaries” (Smith, 2005, p. 94). But she speaks about *The Beaches of Agnès* in different terms: “I see it as an Unidentified Flying Object, because it doesn’t belong to documentary really, even though I speak about real people, and it’s not a fiction film because it’s my life. And it’s not action, it’s not totally fantastical, it’s not a thriller. It’s a film that comes out of me. As a cinematic object, that’s the way I see it” (Varda, 2014, p. 195). This particular project is thus self-referential not merely because it tells the director’s life story (anyway, as viewers we have no way to determine whether we’re being shown her “true life” or a deliberately constructed “[true] story about her life”), but, more importantly, because it visualizes an “unidentified cinematic object” being born of the director’s body.

Within in this dense, collage-like project comprising multiple quotations, captured and collected images, overlapping voices and instances of sensuous excitement, there can be identified several repeated formal techniques that broaden the array of methods used to problematize the body in cinema. Varda is conscious of the constant tension between bodies and image, a tension that can never be reduced to unidirectional representation. In once scene we see Varda at a flea market – surrounded by dishes, sewing machines, and numerous other objects that happen to evoke constant associations with her films – where she finds boxes full of movie cards, two of which features herself and Demy. Holding them in her hand, she says: “Before we were cinema cards with cardboard heads, we were flesh and blood beings. Lovers, like Magritte’s.”

The scene cuts and we see a kind of cinematic staging (a live painting) of René Magritte’s painting *The Lovers* (*Les Amants*, 1928). But unlike the original, this image depicts the lovers naked and in full, with only their heads covered in canvas. We thus see how Varda moves from her most intimate memories to cinematic and painterly visual clichés, making ever more references and using ostensibly simple formal techniques to expose the process, in its whole complexity, of the body becoming an image. But what is always at stake, what constantly remains the central issue, is cinema.

This mechanism is perhaps more fully revealed in another sequence, when Varda approaches what we might assume to be the most difficult moment in her intimate and creative story: the death of her husband. The film *Jacquot de Nantes*, mentioned previously, is in fact analyzed in *The Beaches of Agnès*; its collage-like structure comprises reenactments of scenes from Demy’s youth, excerpts of his films, and, finally, the most heartbreaking shots in which we see his dying body. Commenting on these scenes, Varda says: “In this difficult time, this hard road he was on, all I could do was stay by his side, be as close to him as possible. As a filmmaker: my only option was to film him in extreme close up: his skin, his eye, his hair like a landscape, his hands, his spots. I needed to do this, take these images of him, of his very matter. Jacques dying, but Jacques still alive.” What is characteristic here is her obligation to be at once a wife who stands by her husband and a filmmaker who stands by her preferred means of expression. It’s not just in her off-camera commentary that she underscores the need for particular formal solutions. *The Beaches of Agnès* becomes an opportunity to augment her earlier project, to add new layers to it. In the next scene, Varda talks about Demy’s death – we see her tightly wrapped from head to toe in a white costume (as if the death of her husband had somehow

deprived her of her corporeality – so powerfully and sensuously reconstructed in the Magritte painting – or suspended it for the period of mourning, symbolized by the white fabric), sitting with her back to the camera, on a black chair, at a black table, in front of a black wall. Her outfit becomes a screen onto which a moving picture of the sea is projected. She switches on a radio. The words fall silent, and sounds join the image filmed with a static camera – in this short shot, which may be seen as the perfect cinematic epitaph, the intimate experience is combined with the language of art in a deeply sensual yet strictly filmic manner.

The Beaches of Agnès is also a film in which Varda consistently reminds us that the sensuous experience in the cinema hinges on more than just the filmmaker’s entanglement in her own recollections and images, but also relies on her friends and family, the film crew, and the viewers. We encounter the crew in the film’s opening scenes, when, together with Varda, they arrange mirrors of various sizes on the beach, reflecting images of individual people, the director herself, and the sea. Here the mirrors – I return to this subject later – become symbols of the proliferation of images, at once reminding us of the image’s indirect status in cinema. It is also by way of the mirror that Varda draws the viewers into her project in a later scene. She recalls the many old frames she found in her Paris home, which she had bought in a state of utter disrepair; one of them was square shaped, with a round opening, and she would often use it for pictures, eventually putting a mirror in it. The film features shots of the mirror being held in front of Varda’s face by a crew member, obscuring it while reflecting the operator and her camera. The frame of the picture/mirror becomes a film frame. We hear Varda’s voice: “If you want to look at the spectators, you have to look into the camera. I look at the camera constantly.”

Once again, a straightforward technique produces a highly complex and unexpected effect: Varda isn’t looking at the camera, after all, but she has the spectators look into it, thus entangling them in the structure of catoptric and filmic reflections.

This scene can also provoke questions about the strategies of reflexivity and self-representation that Cybelle H. McFadden examines in her book. Throughout the film, Varda employs a number of practices that aim to deconstruct the unstable, though not necessarily incoherent, image of herself, and to find cinematic equivalents of her own recollections, emotions, and sensations. In the early scenes on the beach at Sète, for example, we participate in what might even be described as visual-performance rituals. In the sand Varda writes “Arlette,” her birth name which she changed at the age of eighteen; the waves wash away the fleeting inscription in the sand. In the next shots Varda arranges childhood photos (visual material) on the sand while recreating a scene (performance) in which young girls, dressed in the bathing suits seen in the photographs, play florists, selling paper flowers – a game greatly enjoyed by little Arlette/Agnès. Varda approaches and asks them (and the viewers, in equal measure): “I don’t know what it means to recreate a scene like this. Do we relive the moment? For me it’s cinema, it’s a game.” Here, cinema can be seen as simultaneously the practice of collecting, reconstructing, and creating images that nevertheless retain their strictly corporeal, memorial, and sensuous ties to the filmmaker. Katherine Ince points out yet another technique, one that draws the director’s body directly into this performative game: “The most frequent and striking example of symbolic embodiment in *The Beaches of Agnès*, however, is the humorous but entirely knowing device of walking backwards, which Varda does first on the beach at Sète, again on the Pont des Arts, and later in several more

of the film's locations. This bodily mime of the process of remembering is Varda's personal contribution to the multiple 'living' installations that feature in her film" (Ince, 2013, p. 608). In Varda's picture even the process of recollection, one that would seem so immaterial, so radically internalized, is expressed by capturing in the film image the corporeality of the body in motion – a reverse motion evoking the processes of memory.

Varda's entire film can therefore be regarded not as a cinematic autobiography, which inevitable brings to mind narrative strategies, but as a cinematic self-portrait, central to which are visual strategies that are geared towards expressing the materiality of the body rather than recounting a life story. This interpretation is proposed by Tadeusz Lubelski, whose analysis of *The Beaches of Agnès* distinguishes three mechanisms used to construct this self-portrait: performance (including, along with the scenes listed above, ones in which a young actress playing Varda accompanies her on screen), reportage (when Varda pauses her authorial techniques and commentary to film her friends and family, capturing a supposedly unscripted reality), and intertextual references (particularly in the form of commented upon and deconstructed quotations from her own films and those of other directors, as well as photographs and paintings) (Lubelski, 2011, pp. 33–41). One might get the impression that assigning *The Beaches of Agnès* to the category of self-portrait strengthens the figure of the *auteur*, placing her at the center of the film's visual, performative, and narrative structures. In keeping with the thesis formulated above, however, Varda's use of a powerful sensuous and corporeal charge in the film allows her to challenge the logic of center versus periphery and to conceive of the *auteur* in different terms. This is most fully apparent in the opening and closing scenes of the film, which I examine as I approach to my conclusions.

The aforementioned opening scene depicting Varda and her crew arranging mirrors on the beach can be interpreted as a sort of making-of documentary, a straightforward reference to the title of the film, or a clear introduction of spaces that are of particular importance to the director. "This time, to talk about myself, I thought: If we opened people up, we'd find landscapes. If we opened me up, we'd find beaches," Varda says at the very onset. It seems, however, that what is key to this short (and at times unapologetically maudlin) scene is its reflection on the image, captured in the image itself. The beach simultaneously serves as a kind of internal and external space, and resurfaces as such throughout the film and the director's statements. The image is defined in this scene as reality redoubled or proliferated without disrupting the external or internal worlds, instead portraying their mutual permeation, overlapping, and cohabitation. The ontology of the image (not just the photographic or cinematic, but any image) relies on the category of reflection, but Varda evidently broadens our understanding of the concept. A reflection (depicted in the prologue to the film as a mirror image) is more than just a faithful reproduction and cannot be enclosed in some separate space, "beside" or "in front of" reality. Image-reflections are within reality itself and become a particular means of intervening in it – an intervention that is radically subjective and embodied. Varda shows how the perspective model supposedly adopted by cinema can be deconstructed from within the image itself. For the film image, three-dimensional space is not a challenge, but its natural habitat.

In Varda's depiction, the film image is an immanent part of reality, and thus our perception of the image cannot be limited to sight; it must be perceived through various senses. In this sense, the image is inevitably more than a prison for the body or its poor

representation; bodies and images co-populate reality together, coexisting and interacting with each other in complex ways. In the final scenes of *The Beaches of Agnès*, Varda elaborates her ongoing reflections on the topic of the film image, addressing the question of the essence of cinema. We see the filmmaker in a shack or hut made of film stock. She is seated in the center atop a stack of film cans, surrounded on all sides by a sort of curtain of film strips cut to equal length. Sunlight filters through the color film, giving us fleeting glances of the images captured on individual frames. Varda says: "This shack has a story. Once upon a time two good and beautiful actors played in a film which turned out to be a flop. The gleaner that I am, I salvaged the abandoned prints of the film and unrolled the reels. And the two good and beautiful actors became walls and surfaces, bathed in light." The two actors are Catherine Deneuve and Michel Piccoli, who appeared in Varda's 1966 film *Les Créatures*. The movie was in fact a bomb, but the filmmaker salvages the failed images containing the enchanted bodies of the "good and beautiful actors," extracting them from the darkness and bringing them back to life. This ritual involving the liberation of film bodies by once again shining light through the images that bind them gives Varda an opportunity to ultimately face the question: "What is cinema?" "Light coming from somewhere captured by images more or less – dark or colorful. In here, it feels like I live in cinema, cinema is my home. I think I've always lived in it." The cinema is described directly as a space of experience, both bodily and sensuous, as an environment in which life intensifies, not a distancing representation of that life.

Varda elaborates her definition of cinema in one of her interviews: "This is what cinema is all about. Images, sound, whatever, are what we use to construct a way which is cinema,

which is supposed to produce effects, not only in our eyes and ears, but in our 'mental' movie theater in which image and sound already are there. There is a kind of on-going movie all the time, in which the movie that we see comes in and mixes, and the perception of all these images and sound proposed to us in a typical film narration piles up in our memory with other images, other associations of images, other films, but other mental images that we have, they preexist. So a new image in a film titillates or excites another mental image already there or emotions that we have, so when you propose something to watch and hear, it goes, it works" (Quart, 1986–1987, p. 7). Like *The Beaches of Agnès*, this statement seems surprisingly consonant with the central Bergsonian formula that opens the first chapter of *Matter and Memory*: "Here I am in the presence of images" (Bergson, 1929, p. 1). The entire universe, all of matter, is a collection of images that mutually influence and react to each other, and which we perceive when we use our senses – and do not perceive when these senses are not used. Bergson in his concept of matter overcomes the limitations of idealism and realism in one fell swoop, demonstrating that the image is more than mere "representation" to the idealist and less than a "thing" to the realist; it is precisely mid-way. Being in the cinema is therefore one of the ways of being in the world, a way of thinking about the world, perhaps even the fullest and most perfect way of doing so, as it involves at once memory and perception, sensuous and bodily sensations. These two scenes from *The Beaches of Agnès* depict the film image as contiguous, viscous, simultaneously overpowering and fragmented, dispersed and fleeting; meanwhile, the cinema as a place and experience is at once closed and open, isolating and liberating, material and spectral, condemning the spectator to loneliness and facilitating encounters.

But the scene in the film stock shack is not the final one: after the film credits end, we see a sequence depicting a birthday party held at the home of Agnès Varda, who receives eighty brooms from her guests. The final shot portrays the filmmaker seated on a chair, holding what initially appears to be a picture of the brooms. The footage is edited to produce a *mise en abyme* effect, an image of infinite depth; we see Varda in the frame, sitting amidst brooms and holding a frame depicting an image of Varda holding a frame... The picture deepens while simultaneously receding, and the director says the final sentence: "It all happened yesterday and it's already the past. A sensation combined instantly with the image, which will remain. While I live I remember." Varda's films, and particularly *The Beaches of Agnès*, are a space in which "sensations combine instantly with the image," and are extended and reinforced by that image. This could be the most precisely articulated sensuous film theory in practice.

The final sentence uttered in the film introduces one last, thoroughly corporeal theme: death. Cybelle H. McFadden also points out the threat to the body that is death, and the fact that the film image can somehow mitigate that threat. At the same time, she argues that *The Beaches of Agnès* "establishes Varda as a key figure in French cinema, since the female cinematic body that emerges at the end of the film has gained artistic authority; this film inscribes Varda into the French film canon in a deeper way than merely referencing her as the precursor to the New Wave. [...] The film itself and the female cinematic body it creates eulogize Varda's artistic creation in a way that preserves her body of work – ensuring that her artistic corpus will live on after her human body ultimately ceases to be" (McFadden, 2014, pp. 35–36). Performing authorship by forming sensuous and corporeal bonds with the image reveals itself to be the ultimate

gesture undermining not just the fundamental category of modernist cinema, but the entire logic underlying the history of cinema. At one point in *The Beaches of Agnès*, during the discussion of Varda's relationship with New Wave filmmakers, there appears a photographic collage that is a variation on an image that is strongly anchored in art history, in which Magritte's painting *I Do Not See the [Woman] Hidden in the Forest* (*Je ne vois pas [une femme] cachée dans la forêt*, 1929) is shown surrounded by pictures of prominent Surrealist artists. In Varda's film, it is she who appears in the center ("La Varda," we are told by the distorted off-camera voice of Chris Marker), surrounded by smaller photographs of the leading figures of the New Wave. I see the woman hidden (revealed) amidst the images. 👁

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Agnès Varda pośród obrazów. Zmysłowa teoria filmu a strategie oporu w kinie feministycznym

Abstrakt

Zmysłowa teoria filmu wzbogaciła sposób, w jaki analizuje się dziś z jednej strony wielozmysłowy obraz filmowy, a z drugiej ucieleśnione doświadczenie widza kinowego. Z tej perspektywy rzadziej natomiast pyta się o cielesność i zmysłowość reżysera/reżyserki. Tymczasem to właśnie ten aspekt wydaje się szczególnie interesujący, ponieważ pozwala powrócić do kwestii związanych z kobiecymi strategiami twórczymi w kinie i postawić pytania o sens i status zmysłowego zaangażowania reżyserki w realizację filmu. Czy jej cielesność, doświadczenia fizjologiczne i sensoryczne wpływają na konstrukcję bohaterek, świata przedstawionego, a przede wszystkim samą materię obrazu filmowego? Czy takie zaangażowanie może stać się również świadomą taktyką oporu przeciwko dominującym strukturom narracyjnym i wizualnym „męskiego kina”? Wychodząc od tych pytań, koncentruję się na filmie Agnès Vardy z 2008 roku *Plaże Agnès (Les plages d'Agnès)*, który można uznać za wypowiedź tyleż osobistą i autotematyczną, co dającą się uniwersalizować. Za pomocą tego filmu Varda przygląda się swojemu życiu i twórczości w kontekście historii kina drugiej połowy XX wieku ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem francuskiej Nowej Fali, kina autorskiego, kina kobiet, kina niezależnego i kina politycznego i społecznie zaangażowanego. Varda stawia pytania dotyczące własnego statusu jako kobiety reżyserki, akcentując cielesne, zmysłowe i afektywne związki z obrazem filmowym, filmowanymi obiektami, ludźmi i miejscami, ekipą filmową i wreszcie kinem jako takim.

Słowa kluczowe:

Agnès Varda, Laura U. Marks, Vivian Sobchack, reżyserki filmowe, kino kobiet, feministyczna teoria kina, zmysłowa teoria kina, kino autorskie, francuska Nowa Fala.



Performing Feminist Resistance on Twitter: The case of #ParliamoneSabato in the Italian Twittersphere

TOMMASO TRILÒ

Abstract

In mid-March, 2017, Italian public television channel RAI Uno aired the last episode of a popular show called *Parliamone... Sabato*. The episode discussed the romantic preferences of Italian men, and – particularly – why Italian men allegedly fantasize about Eastern European women as their ideal partners. Following the episode, a portion of the public rose in outrage for the sexist and racist content of the show. The protest obtained the cancellation of the show and a public apology by the RAI network soon thereafter. One of the key sites for the protest was the official Twitter hashtag of the show (#ParliamoneSabato). This paper offers a discourse-centered online ethnography of a corpus of tweets gathered from #ParliamoneSabato during the two weeks following the announcement that the show would be put off the air. Text circulated via Twitter was analyzed in light of its broader context thanks to online observation and limited ethnographic engagement in the analog realm. The protest tweeted at #ParliamoneSabato was analyzed through the lenses of Bennett and Sageberg's 'logic of connective action' and Kelsey and Bennett's 'synoptic resistance', as well as through the work of others involved in the study of the relationship between social media and social movements. This paper concludes that, despite its spontaneous character and its focus on singling out the misconducts of 'the few' running the *Parliamone... Sabato*, the overall features of the public involved in the protest (especially the narrowness of the user base) make it hard to characterize it as a self-organized protest of 'the many'. In particular, it is crucial to notice that the protest might have originated somewhat spontaneously and mostly online, but almost immediately traveled into the analog world thanks to the brokerage of the Italian feminist movement "Non una di meno". A closer look at the language used in the context of the protest highlights that much of the conversation betrays some level of anxiety on behalf of the Italian public because of a (real or imagined) growth in diversity within the country and its intertwining with gender issues and gender-related politics.

Keywords:

[Social media](#), [twitter politics](#), [Italy](#), [Parliamone Sabato](#), [Non una di meno](#).

Introduction

On 18 March 2017, Italian public television channel RAI Uno aired what ended up being the last episode of a relatively popular talk show called *Parliamone... Sabato* [‘let’s talk about it... on Saturday’]. The show used to air in the primetime afternoon slot (4.40 – 6.45 p.m.) and enjoy relatively broad viewership (on average, 1.5 million viewers per episode) (Zacconi, 2017). Despite its success, the show was abruptly taken off the air after widespread outrage for the content of its last airing. This episode discussed ‘the romantic preferences of Italian men’, with a particular focus on why Italian men seem to fantasize of Eastern European women as their ideal partners. The show identified six imagined reasons for this imaginary, and namely that:

- ▶ They are all mothers, but after giving birth they manage to regain a sculpture-like body;
- ▶ They are always sexy: no sweatpants or large pajamas;
- ▶ When it comes to cheating, they are forgiving;
- ▶ They are willing to let their men be in charge;
- ▶ They are perfect housewives and they learn housework from an early age;
- ▶ They do not wine, they are not clingy, and they do not hold grudges¹.

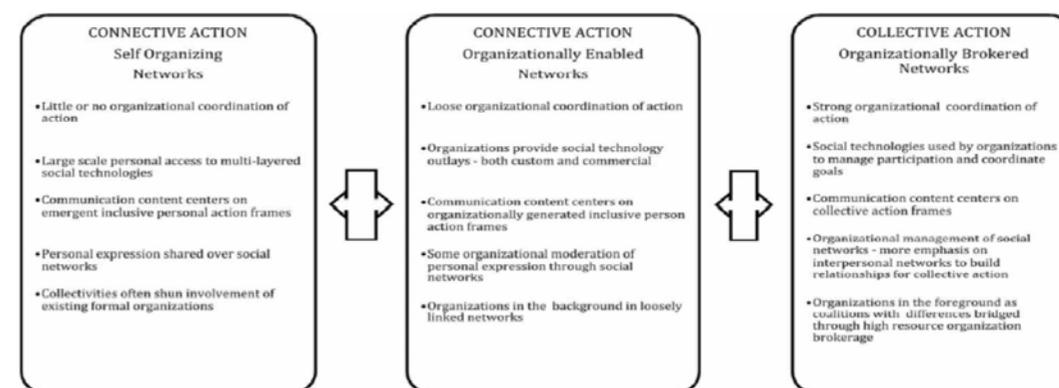
Soon after an infographic with the list above aired, a portion of the Italian public mobilized to oppose the narrative therein advanced. The public articulated three key demands: a public apology for the sexism and racism involved, the resignation of the journalist hosting the show (Paola Peregò), and the cancellation of the show from the schedule of public TV networks. Interestingly, all of

the above demands were granted by the administration of RAI. One of the spaces where public mobilization took place was the official social media hashtag of the show #ParliamoneSabato. During the two weeks following the last episode of the show, more than 15,000 messages were tweeted or retweeted at #ParliamoneSabato. This paper presents the findings of a discourse-centered online ethnography (DCOE) focusing of the social media mobilization around the above described case within its broader contextual framework.

Literature review and theoretical framework

The main lens for the analysis carried out in this paper is the theorization of ‘connective action’ advanced by Bennett and Segerberg (2012). According to Bennett and Segerberg, the advent of new communication technologies (such as commercial social media) brought about new possibilities for social mobilization. While in the past people used to voice their grievances through ‘collective action formations’ (forms of communication that emerge as the output of centralized consultation within a community of practices), nowadays it is possible to engage in public advocacy on an individual basis. In their view, people increasingly voice their grievances through what they termed ‘personalized action formations’: individual political viewpoints somewhat related to a loosely defined political claim (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012, pp. 774–6). The crucial difference lies in the role of institutional brokers. While collective action formations require presence of some (however light) structure to produce a unified narrative and convey it beyond the boundary of the community producing it, personalized action formation can be voiced individually and can travel across community boundaries thanks

Image 1: Elements of connective and collective action networks (Bennet and Sageberg, 2012)



to the affordances of commercial social media (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012, p. 777).

Based on the above, Bennett and Segerberg (2012) advance a threefold typology for present day social mobilization. The first category is represented by ‘self-organizing networks’: people that mostly use personalized action formations and respond to what they termed ‘the logic of connective action’. The second category is represented by ‘institutionally brokered networks’: groups that mostly use collective action formations and follow what they termed as ‘the logic of collective action’. The final category is represented by the ‘institutionally-enabled networks’, exemplifying the tension between the two logics.

Bennet and Segerberg’s theorization enjoys wide popularity. Many have built upon their work to argue for the advent of new forms of social mobilization on digital media platforms. For example, Papacharissi argued that affective communication via social media platforms is a key element in the work of present day social movements (Papacharissi, 2015). Via group-based mechanisms of validation, people participating in a connective action jointly frame the message of their movement (‘collective framing’ (Meraz and Papacharissi,

2013)) and jointly select the opinion leaders most apt to circulate it (‘networked gatekeeping’ (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008)) without necessarily building any formal structure. Given the importance of affect in this form of social mobilization, Papacharissi (2015) terms these groups ‘affective publics’.

Others have cautioned against overly-enthusiastic approach towards the role that social media can play in favoring public mobilization. Fuchs, for example, has recurrently argued for the continued relevance of collective action because of the highly unequal distribution of visibility in online spaces (e.g. Fuchs, 2011). Fuchs contends that production and circulation of information on commercial social media is largely dominated by the entertainment industry, with political debate being very much on the sidelines. Even within the niche of online political debate, those actors that enjoy visibility are not those that rise to prominence through group-based systems of validation, but rather individuals that happen to have preferential access to visibility because previously endowed with a disproportionate share of material, symbolic, and discursive resources (Fuchs, 2013). In a relatable although less skeptical vein, Gerbaudo

1 All translations from Italian are from the author.

(2012) argues that social media have indeed changed the way in which social mobilization takes place, but haven't necessarily removed the need for institutional brokerage. In his view, most present day forms of social mobilization take place thanks to the work of some hidden 'choreographers' (i.e. movement leaders) that set the scene for others to perform their protest. That is to say, social media have certainly offered new spaces of visibility where individuals can voice their grievances without formal adherence to a movement. However, these spaces of visibility are almost invariably produced by some behind the scene brokers.

In light of the above, celebrating social media because of their potential to fuel 'revolutions' would probably be throwing the baby away with the bath water. However, it would be equally wrong to deny that commercial social media have opened new possibilities for the public to perform resistance. Building on Bennet's and Sagerber's model, Kelsey and Bennet (2014) have offered an understanding of social media as spaces where it is possible to witness the interplay of power and resistance in terms of panoptic (Foucault, 1977), synoptic (Bauman and Lyon, 2013) and omnioptic (Jensen, 2007) surveillance/resistance. In other words, commercial social media are platforms where surveillance can be exerted by the few onto the many, by the many onto the few, and by the many onto the many. In this context, they have advanced the concept of 'synoptic resistance' to refer to those instances where 'the many' (e.g. individuals) use social media platforms to voice their dissent and thus perform discursive resistance to the narrative advanced by 'the few' (e.g. the government, the media industry, etc.).

Methodology

This paper offers an overview of the public response to the last episode of *Parliamone... Sabato* as voiced by users of the social media

platform Twitter via the official hashtag of the show #ParliamoneSabato during the two weeks following the announcement that the show would be cancelled (20 March – 2 April, 2017). The corpus of data under scrutiny comprises 17,450 between tweets and retweets. The material was retrieved through the NCapture function of the NVivo 11 software for qualitative analysis.

The objective of the paper is to interpret the event in object through the above developed theoretical framework and therefore assess the extent to which the protest tweeted at #ParliamoneSabato can be said to be an act of synoptic resistance. To do so, this paper adopts a methodology inspired by Andoutsopoulos' (2008; 2013) Discourse-Centered Online Ethnography (DCOE). The overall narrative emerging from the corpus of messages tweeted at #ParliamoneSabato is scrutinized in light of contextual elements gathered through screen-based observation during the days in which the protest unfolded as well as broader ethnographic engagement. DCOE can be a particularly suitable approach for the study of the relationship between social media and public mobilization because of its devotion to context beyond a strict focus on text as circulated on a given online platform. Discourse analysis can shed light on the extent to which framing of the protest tweeted at #ParliamoneSabato can be said to be spontaneously crowdsourced or institutionally brokered. Screen-based observation can shed light on the features of the public that participated in the protest tweeted at #ParliamoneSabato. Offline engagement can place the campaign in its broader context and point out the presence or absence of a group of 'choreographers' that might or might not have set the scene for the protest to take place.

The following elements were taken into consideration for this paper. First, the dataset was ordered in such a way as to display the

most popular tweets by number of retweets in a largest-to-smallest fashion. After a first screening of the accounts that happened to be most popular in the discussion, five broad categories of accounts participating in the discussion were inductively developed. These are, namely: 'satirical' accounts, accounts belonging to 'news outlets', 'feminist' accounts, accounts belonging to 'politicians', and 'anti-equality' accounts. Second, a visual representation of the relationship between the users producing original content to those retweeting said content was produced through the Nodes XL software. This served the purpose of visualizing what users occupied central positions in the discussion and what users remained on the margins of it. The ten most popular accounts from each category were color-coded in order to facilitate visualization.

Third, the 5,976 original tweets (i.e. not re-tweets) gathered for this study were made object of word frequency analysis in order to detect broad topics of discussion in the corpus. Finally, the 915 original tweets retweeted twice or more were made object of in-depth critical discourse analysis. Particular emphasis was devoted to strategies of nomination, predication, and argumentation as outlined over time in the work of Wodak (e.g. Wodak, 2009). Attention was also devoted to strategies of legitimization/delegitimization following the framework by Van Leeuwen (2007).

Network analysis

Some 17,000+ messages were tweeted or retweeted at #ParliamoneSabato during the timespan under consideration. These messages were produced or retweeted by a total of 10,114 unique users. Once that is narrowed down to the 5,976 original tweets contained in the corpus, the user base participating shrinks to 3,739 unique users. Narrowing down again to the 915 tweets retweeted twice or more, the users producing original content are as

few as 643. These numbers alone can provide a sense of how wide the public participating in the protest actually was and inform any further claim about the relevance of social media mobilization in obtaining the cancellation of the show and a public apology by RAI.

A closer look at the most retweeted messages in the dataset shows strong homogeneity among the producers. Satire dominated the discussion. The three most popular tweets were all from satirical blogs or commentators (@PamelaFerrara, @_the_Jackal, and @GianniCuperloPD), and so was the sixth most retweeted one (by @pisto_goal). Mainstream news outlets also enjoyed fairly broad popularity in terms of retweets, producing the fourth, eighth, and tenth most retweeted posts in the corpus (respectively by @raiofficialnews, journalist @fabiofr, and @republicait). Three other actors entered the top ten of most retweeted posts, each of them coming from a different group. The fifth most retweeted post was produced by the (at the time) Speaker of the lower house of the Italian parliament Laura Boldrini (@lauraboldrini), one of the most visible political figures in Italy as well as one of the most active on social media. The seventh most retweeted tweet was produced by the official account of the Italian feminist movement Non una di meno (@nonunadimeno). Finally, the ninth most popular tweet was produced by an anti-equality blogger (@cris_cersei), who exploited the visibility of the issue at hand to advocate against a possible law on surrogate motherhood.

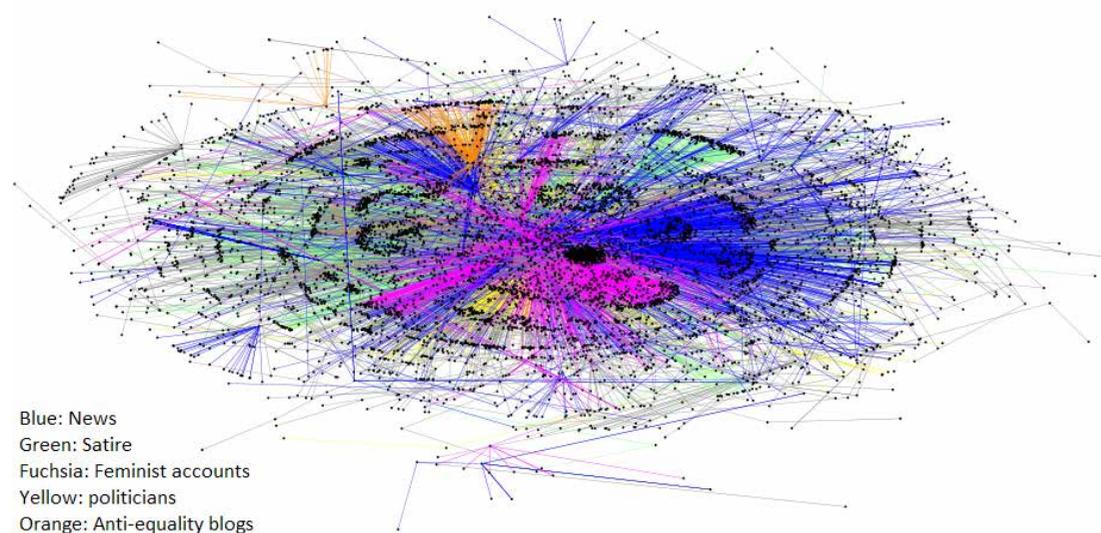
Chart 1: top tweets by number of retweets

rank	username	user category	# of RTs
1	PamelaFerrara	Feminist/journalist	573
2	_the_Jackal	Satirical blog	362
3	GianniCuperloPD	Satirical blog	331
4	Raiofficialnews	Mainstream news	278
5	lauraboldrini	Politician	217
6	pisto_goal	Satirical blog	194
7	nonunadimeno	Feminist movement	184
8	fabiofr	Journalist	178
9	cris_cersei	Anti-equality blog	172
10	Republicait	Mainstream news	170

As a matter of fact, the dataset shows a quite strong degree of homophily. That is to say, users with similar characteristics tend to cluster around each other rather than communicating and sharing information with users having different characteristics and points of view. Once the relationship between tweet producers and those retweeting their content

is visualized on a scatter plot, it is immediately manifest that the discussion was mostly dominated by mainstream news and satire, with feminist accounts, politicians, and anti-equality bloggers occupying separate niches that overlap with either news or satire but not with each other.

Image 2: network visualization



Word frequency

An exploratory look at the most frequent-words in the corpus shows what follows. Besides the obvious primacy of the hashtag #ParliamoneSabato as the most recurrent world in the corpus, there is a clear prominence for the name of the TV network RAI (either as 'RAI', appearing 1,102 times in the corpus, or as '#raiuno', appearing 340 times in the corpus) and for the TV hostess running the show Paola Perego. Indeed, 'Perego' features 626 times in the corpus, her twitter

handle @paolaperego appears 342 times, the hashtag #paolaperego appears as many as 336 times, and her first name 'Paola' appears 213 times. In light of the above, it is possible to speculate that the protest tweeted at #ParliamoneSabato strongly emphasized the impersonal responsibility of the TV network RAI. Even more prominently, the public seemed to hold TV hostess Paola Perego personally responsible for leading a show in which sexist and racist content was unproblematically presented to as many as 1.5 million viewers.

Chart 2: 20 most frequentwords in the corpus

Rank	Frequency	word	Translation
1	5,976	#ParliamoneSabato	#Let'sTalkAboutItOnSaturday
2	1,102	RAI	
3	714	Est	East
4	626	Perego	
5	625	Donne	Women
6	419	Programma	TV Show
7	342	@peregopaola	
8	340	#raiuno	
9	336	#paolaperego	
10	319	Chiuso	Shut down
11	279	Chiude	Shuts down
12	256	TV	
13	227	Dopo	After
14	216	Donna	Woman
15	213	Paola	
16	209	Chiusura	The shutting down
17	202	Chiudere	To shut down
18	195	Motivi	Reasons
19	187	Solo	Only
20	182	Servizio	Service

The list of most frequent words in the corpus contains some noteworthy homogeneity for what concerns verbs. There seems to be a strong emphasis on the action of 'shutting down', either as an adjective (*chiuso*), as a substantive (*chiusura*), as an infinitive (*chiudere*), or at the present tense (*chiude*). The centrality of the gesture of 'shutting down' the TV show might hint to a strong prominence of descriptive action in the corpus, possibly in the form of journalistic reportages on the final act of the scandal: the shutting down of *Parliamone... Sabato* on Monday, March 20th.

Critical discourse analysis

a. Satirical accounts

A large portion of the dataset was dominated by relatively few satirical accounts that mocked *Parliamone... Sabato* by comparing the infographic on Eastern European women to a wide range of other lists of imagined reasons to be romantically involved with other categories of people. Looking back to the original list, it is self-evident that the message therein contained constructed 'Italian men' as the ingroup of its narrative. Conversely, 'Eastern European women' were constructed as a passivated object group upon which the ingroup 'Italian men' would predicate the action of 'choosing'. Furthermore, the original infographic backgrounds 'Italian women' as a group of passive bystanders that happen to be unfit for the 'choosing' of 'Italian men'. Most of the ironic takes on the original list aimed at subverting the narrative therein implied, often by changing the positionality of the actors involved. For example, the most popular tweet in the dataset (553 retweets) said that:

The public awaits the sequel "reasons to choose [an affair with] an African [male] lover"... #ParliamoneSabato, Rai Uno

(@PamelaFerrara, satirical blogger, 20 March 2017)².

In open polemic with the male-catered infographic presented in the show, the producer of this message projects the image of an active ingroup of 'Italian women' that 'awaits' a follow up episode of *Parliamone... Sabato* in which they would be finally presented as the agents having reasons to 'choose' and African [male] lover for an affair. Formerly the ingroup, 'Italian men' are now backgrounded as passive bystanders who fail to live up to the higher (implicitly sexualized) standard of African men and thus remain unfit for the 'choosing' of 'Italian women'.

In a similar fashion, Satirical group The Jackal (@_the_jackal) produced a mock infographic outlining six 'reasons to choose an Italian boyfriend'. The infographic was attached as a picture to a tweet saying 'Here is a preview of the new inquiry by Paola Perego at #ParliamoneSabato', and listed the following as reasons:

- ▶ If you show them as little as one boob, they'll do whatever you want
- ▶ With that belly, no one will take him away from you
- ▶ They usually do not notice if you cheat on them
- ▶ You can make them believe they are in charge
- ▶ You won't ever have to iron, wash, or cook: their mom is there to take care of that

² The dataset under scrutiny was compiled by the author. For purposes of intelligibility, tweets from the dataset will be cited in the following format: (@[TwitterUserName], [description], [full date]). Directly cited tweets by users with less than 5,000 followers who do not describe themselves on Twitter as public figures were anonymized and referenced in the following format: (@[PrivateUserNumber], private user, [full date]).

- ▶ They wine, cling, and hold grudges, but only when their football team loses a match. (@_the_jackal, satirical blog, 20 March 2017)

As it was the case with the post above, The Jackal is imagining a future episode of the show in which the ingroup endowed with the power to perform the action of 'choosing' is 'women' (perhaps 'non-Italian women'). The passivated object of the action of choosing is 'Italian men'. Differently from the original infographic or the previous example, however, no group is clearly present in the background as bystanders unworthy of being 'chosen'.

It is worth reflecting on the gendered and sexualized features of the groups constructed in these lists. Firstly, the original list as well as the two examples above imply heterosexuality as a feature of ingroup and outgroups alike. Secondly, all the examples assume romantic relationships to be formed on the basis of a unilateral 'choice' operated by whichever groups is presented as agentic rather than as a shared decision jointly undertaken by all the actors involved. What's more, romantic relationships are constructed as 0-sum games in which one of the parties benefits from being deceitful towards the other. Cheating with impunity is implied to be proof that the ingroup is 'winning' the game. Thirdly, 'Eastern European women' as well as 'African [male] lovers' are presented as a romantically/sexually appealing 'others' on the basis on sexist and racist stereotypes to the benefit of the broader ingroup of 'Italians'. Finally, the construction of Italian men in the latter example is still dependent on intergenerational sexism towards a passivated category of women: their mothers. In sum, protest through irony and satire in the case of #ParliamoneSabato is not immune from sexism and racism on a part with the sexism/racism that triggered the tweeted protest in the first place.

b. Mainstream News Outlets

Mainstream news outlets, journalists, and more or less independent bloggers featured largely among the most active and popular users tweeting at #ParliamoneSabato during the sampled timespan. While their voices were prominent and widely retweeted, their messages were fairly dry. For example, the official Twitter outlet of the RAI public broadcasting network drily commented on the issue by stating that:

#ParliamoneSabato shut down: 'it contradicts the mission of public broadcasting service' [follows link to news article] (@raiofficialnews, mainstream news outlet, 20 March 2017).

In a similar vein, Rome-based and left-leaning newspaper *La Repubblica* tweeted that:

#Rai shuts down the show #ParliamoneSabato because of the episode on the 'six reasons to choose an Eastern European woman' [follows link to news article] (@repubblicait, mainstream news outlet, 20 March 2017).

In both these cases, the action 'shutting down' is central to the narrative, to some extent confirming the impression that much of the reporting on the issue focused on the final act of the scandal. The show *Parliamone... Sabato* is in these examples the object upon which the action of shutting down is predicated. In the former example, the subject performing the shutting down is some implicit authority that, after performing the action, is also granted the authority to speak with its own voice: it is in fact quoted while presenting reasons to legitimate the action. In the latter example, the subject performing the action

is the RAI television network: the impersonal authority responsible for airing the show in the first place and thus also in charge of taking it off the air.

In the former example, the shutting down of the show is justified with a vaguely worded mismatch between the content of the show and the mission of public television service. In the latter, this mismatch is qualified with specific reference to the content of the last episode of the show. In both cases, the topos of reality is deployed to justify the decision. That is to say, action (i.e. the shutting down of the show) is justified in light of the fact that reality (i.e. the mismatch between the content and the mission of the show) happens to be the way it is.

c. Feminist networks and activists

The Italian feminist movement has experienced a fairly vibrant season since the beginning of October 2016, when most of its voices unified under the collective banner of a new network named 'Non una di meno'. The network successfully gathered 200,000 people in the streets of Rome for a rally on the occasion of the International Day for the Eradication of Violence against Women in 2016. Since then, Non una di meno efficiently mobilized analogically and digitally on several occasions, also initiating several hashtag campaigns on Twitter. The movement participated in the protest tweeted at #ParliamoneSabato with several tweets, the most popular of which was the following:

After censoring the women's strike,
Rai performs sexism and racism
#ParliamoneSabato
(@nonunadimeno, feminist movement, 20 March 2017).

This message hints to several features of the movement as well as to the stance of the

movement towards mainstream media. Ever since its earliest public document (a call to join the above mentioned rally in Rome), the movement consistently presented itself as the voice of an collective 'us' made of 'women' standing up to the systemic oppression performed upon them by an 'other' made of governmental and social 'institutions', including public media broadcasting (Non una di meno, 2016). Furthermore, the movement has consistently taken a pro-migrant (especially migrant women) position, grounded in the recognition that the oppression experienced by women and the oppression experienced by migrants is performed by the same structural forces. In light of the above, calling out the RAI network because of its institutional position and its role in performing and reproducing sexism and racism is part of the very mission that the movement took upon itself. Reference to censorship has also been recurrent throughout the lifespan of the movement. Non una di meno often lamented poor or non-existent coverage of their activities on behalf of public and private media broadcasting sources alike.

A self-identifying feminist activist loosely affiliated to the movement tweeted through her account another popular post that echoed the message of the movement by saying that:

@RaiUno I present you the "submissive"
women of Poland, on strike to defend
their right to abortion. October 2016.
#ParliamoneSabato, you are disgusting!
[hyperlink to a picture of women protesting
in Warsaw]
(@PrivateUser1, private user, 20 March 2017)

This tweet is particularly strong because of the use of the first person, with the author taking it upon herself to perform the action of 'presenting' the 'women of Poland' to the RAI TV network. While positioned as object

of the action of 'presenting', the women of Poland are arguably constructed as agentic, insofar as they are portrayed while performing the action 'striking for their right to abortion'. The presence of a picture of the strike complements the text of the tweet, further reinforcing the agentic position constructed for the women of Poland. Reference to the shared oppression of women worldwide is one of the recurrent tropes of Non una di meno, implicitly or explicitly tied to the well-known discourse of 'global sisterhood' (see for example Predelli and Halsaa, 2012). Conversely, the RAI conglomerate is fully passivated, insofar as it receives the 'presenting' performed by the author and is also the object of the descriptive action in the final part of the tweet, where it gets labeled as 'disgusting'.

A semi-structured interview with one of the activists involved in administering the official Twitter handle of Non una di meno highlighted that the movement did not orchestrate the tweeted protest at #ParliamoneSabato. However, it emerged during the same interview that the movement immediately reacted to the event by staging a sit-in outside the RAI headquarters in Rome. The sit-in was advertised on commercial social media with the hashtag #ParliamoneSabato ('let's talk about it now'): a play on words suggesting that a hypothetical 'Saturday' is too late to discuss sexism on public TV.

d. Politicians

At the time of this writing (January 2018), the realm of parliamentary politics in Italy was more or less evenly split between three main currents covering most of the political spectrum: the center-left Partito Democratico (Democratic Party, PD), a collection of so-called 'moderate' center-right forces, and the non-aligned populist party Movimento 5 Stelle

(5 Stars Movement, M5S)³. Politicians from all currents voiced their concern over the episode. Speaker of the lower house of parliament Laura Boldrini (Sinistra Italiana, left-of-center) voiced her disbelief in a post stating that:

There ought to be an immediate sanction from #Rai to the #ParliamoneSabato show. Never again can #women be treated on tv as if they were pets (@lauraboldrini, at the time Speaker of the House, 20 March 2016)

In the first sentence of the tweet, Boldrini exerts her personal authority to compel RAI into issuing sanctions onto the show Parliamone... Sabato. The sentence clearly adopts the topos of urgency: action must be taken immediately in light of an event outside of the control of the speaker. The second sentence in the tweet presents several features that are equally interesting. The topos of urgency is possibly adopted again, with reference to the fact that sexism on public television can 'never again' be tolerated. The group 'women' is presented as the subject of a passive sentence in which the action of 'treating' is predicated upon them in the social space of tv broadcasting. Finally, women are also object of a simile that compares them to 'pets', thus highlighting the dehumanizing nature of sexist commentary.

In a similar vein, center-right MP and former Minister for Equal Opportunities Mara Carfagna commented that:

#Rai should shut down #ParliamoneSabato after reportage that hinders the dignity of women and offends them. There must be

³ General elections took place on 4 March 2018. While no single party achieved a majority, Movimento 5 Stelle and far-right party Lega Nord (Northern League) agreed to form a government. Partito Democratico is currently the main opposition party.

a prompt decision targeted towards the board of the show (@mara_carfagna, former-Minister for Equal Opportunities, 20 March 2017)

Once again, the personal authority of the speaker is summoned to suggest that RAI 'should' perform the action of 'shutting down' #ParliamoneSabato. The topos of urgency is deployed again: deciding on sanctions for the board of the show must be 'prompt'. The group 'women' is again presented in object position. It is their dignity that is receiving the action of 'hindering', predicated by *Parliamone... Sabato's* reportage. Reference to dignity is resonant with the dehumanizing simile in the previous example, hinting to a shared feeling between the two politicians.

One further example is that of Roberto Fico (M5S, populist/non-aligned), who presided the Parliamentary Commission for the Monitoring of RAI Public Television at the time of the episode. His message stated that:

I'll soon summon the Office of the President of RAI to discuss what happened at #ParliamoneSabato (@Roberto_Fico, President of the Parliamentary Commission for the Monitoring of RAI Public Television, 20 March 2017)

The speaker is using his personal authority to convey a feeling of urgency. Differently from the previous examples, however, RAI is no longer the agentic actor. Rather, RAI becomes the object upon which Fico himself predicates the action of 'summoning' for the sake of discussing the content of the show. If the act of 'summoning' conveys a certain degree of urgency, the message by Fico differs from the previous examples insofar as it does not convey any clear call for action. The use of the future tense further diffuses the feeling of

urgency. While in the previous examples actions had to be taken 'now' or 'promptly', Fico's own action will happen 'soon'. The purpose of the summon, namely 'to discuss what happened', does not necessarily imply that sanctions will apply. Therefore, Fico's message can be said to be substantially less concerned with the event than those by his colleagues from different political formations.

e. Anti-equality bloggers

Pro-gender equality protests like the one in object are oftentimes accompanied by anti-equality voices that exploit the visibility of the protest to push their own agenda. The case of #ParliamoneSabato is no exception to this trend. An example is a popular tweet by anti-equality blogger Roger Halsted, where he stated that:

Feminists [are] quacking [like ducks] because of #ParliamoneSabato but have nothing to say on the exploitation behind renting a uterus [Italian vernacular speech for surrogate motherhood] (@RogerHalsted, anti-equality blogger, 20 March 2017)

The speaker is here positioning himself as an observer that happens to be concerned by a scenario in which an outgroup of 'feminists' happens to show outrage for the content of *Parliamone... Sabato* while simultaneously being silent on supposedly more pressing issues such as the possible introduction of a law on surrogate motherhood in Italy⁴. Despite 'feminists' are foregrounded as the subjects of both clauses in this tweet, their voice is heavily delegitimized with an animalizing metaphor:

⁴ At the time of this writing, surrogacy is fully illegal under Italian law, although it is not illegal for Italians to seek surrogacy abroad and register their children upon re-entry.

they are not endowed with the ability to speak, but only that 'to quack' as if they were ducks. Their point of view is further delegitimized by arguing that their concerns are misplaced: sexism in TV is, according to the author, a matter of no relevance when compared to a much greater threat to women's rights supposedly represented by a law on surrogacy, defined through vernacular speech with the degrading metaphor of 'renting a uterus'. Thus, Roger Halsted takes it upon himself to judge the feminists protesting against *Parliamone... Sabato* as 'bad feminists' because of their misplaced anger.

A remarkably similar structure with reference to surrogate motherhood was adopted by another anti-equality blogger (@cris_cersei) whose tweet happened to be the ninth most retweeted one in the dataset. His tweet will not be analyzed here for reasons of space; space that will be devoted to another interesting post by the anti-equality group 'Sentinelle in piedi' (literally, 'standing guards'). Sentinelle in piedi is a group of loosely affiliated individuals who recurrently protest against virtually any public initiative in favor of the rights of sexual minorities and the recognition of non-normative family arrangements. Their official Twitter handle exploited the visibility of the protest at #ParliamoneSabato to argue that:

#ParliamoneSabato jokes on Eastern European women and gets immediately shut down. When the women of #FamilyDay got humiliated on Mediaset no one flinched. (sentinipiedi, anti-equality group, 23 March 2017).

In the first clause above, the show *Parliamone... Sabato* is presented as an agentic subject. The content of the show is dismissed as 'joking'. Eastern European women are, perhaps unsurprisingly, positioned as the object upon which said joke is predicated. In

the coordinate clause, however, *Parliamone... Sabato* becomes the subject of a passive construction in which it 'gets shut down' but an unnamed authority. This transition sets the scene for the second sentence, in which 'the women of #FamilyDay' (an initiative in favor of traditional family formations supported by Sentinelle in piedi) are the subject on the receiving hand of a passive sentence representing them as 'getting humiliated' in an unspecified show aired in the past on Berlusconi-owned private TV network Mediaset. To add to the humiliation, Sentinelle in piedi seem to argue that in that unspecified case 'no one flinched'.

A key element in the argument contained in the tweet above is an overt complaint for double standards applied by the Italian public and Italian authorities when dealing with broadcasted messages offending different groups of women. That is to say, Sentinelle in piedi complain that a supposedly mild scandal towards 'foreign women' (just a joke, as the tweet says) solicited massive public reaction. Conversely, a full-fledged 'humiliation' suffered by 'Italian women' was dismissed by the public as not noteworthy. Embedded in this narrative is the assumption that the Italian public and the Italian authorities operate reverse racism towards 'Italian women', who get no public attention despite allegedly suffering much more serious cases of broadcasted defamation.

Discussion

Through online and limited offline engagement, this paper gathered data to argue that the public reaction to the last episode of *Parliamone... Sabato* was not originally orchestrated by any behind the scenes 'choreographers' (Gerbaudo, 2012). Rather, the public that participated in the tweeted protest seems to have acted in a fashion that resembles the 'affective publics' theorized by Papacharissi (2015). However, the strong prominence of

opinion leaders that enjoyed visibility before the protest began hints to the fact that networked gatekeeping (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008) did not play a major role in shaping which users enjoyed public support. Rather, the popularity of entertainment-related accounts (satirical or journalistic) as well as that of public figures seems to offer ground to support Fuchs' (2013) theorization that social media happen to be spaces where visibility is unequally distributed on the bases of material inequalities. Despite the more or less spontaneous character of the protest, defining the public tweeting at #ParliamoneSabato in terms of a 'self-organizing network' (Bennett and Sageberg, 2012) would probably be too much of a stretch.

The protest was undeniably framed in terms of an act of resistance towards the discourses circulated by 'the few', in this case embodied in the figures of the RAI broadcast network and TV host Paola Peregò, as highlighted in the word count analysis. In this sense, the protest tweeted at #ParliamoneSabato might be said to have included an element of synoptic resistance (Kelsey and Bennett, 2014). Despite being aimed at 'the few', however, the very limited user base actively participating in the protest as well as the prominence of institutional voices in the discussion opens up questions regarding the extent to which it can be said to be an act of resistance staged by 'the many'. Once the number of active users participating in the protest by tweeting at #ParliamoneSabato (some 11,000 users) is compared to the 1.5 million viewers of the show on TV alone, the synoptic character of the protest becomes even more questionable.

Setting aside these concerns and looking more closely at the language adopted in the tweets presented above, it emerges very clearly that gender equality happens to be a fairly divisive political issue in the current Italian political scene. The Twitter handles of mainstream news broadcasters somewhat

dodged the political nature of the debate and hid behind a mask of journalistic objectivity. Frequent recourse to the topos of reality, however, made it so that their narratives contributed to constructing a feeling that actions to shut down the show was justified by the status quo.

The posts by satirical accounts might be said to have highlighted the intertwining of migration issues with gendered relations in Italy. Through a wide array of intersectionally sexist and racist stereotypes, satirical accounts might have spoken to the fact that Italians are somewhat uncomfortable with mixed couples being an increasingly common reality. By humorously foregrounding and backgrounding one or another ethnically defined group of men or women, they might have outed the anxieties of the Italian public in the face of growing diversity.

In light of its recent successes, the Italian feminist movement *Non una di meno* sized the opportunity to participate in the tweeted protest. The movement crafted its message in such a way as to contribute to its broader narrative, in which a collective 'us' made of 'women' is speaking up against structural oppression performed by an 'other' made of 'institutions'. The collective 'us' of *Non una di meno* is inclusive of migrant women and women not living in Italy, as manifest in the recurrence of the narrative of global sisterhood (Predelli and Halsaa, 2012) oftentimes deployed by the movement and its activists. Noticeably, *Non una di meno* promptly brought the protest from the digital to the analog by staging a sit-in in front of the RAI headquarter in Rome, articulating a set of demands, and pressuring authorities into complying. While not being the choreographers that 'set the stage' for the protest at #ParliamoneSabato, *Non una di meno*'s leaders might still be considered to be the 'choreographic leaders' of the network that therein emerged (Gerbaudo, 2012).

Politicians from all currents participated in the protest, stating that sanctions against *Parliamone... Sabato* were in order. In most cases, they summoned the authority of which they are invested to legitimize their claims (Van Leeuwen, 2007), and deployed the topos of urgency to legitimize the need to take prompt action against the board of the show. Animalizing metaphors and reference to human dignity were used to highlight the outrageous character of the content of the show and reinforce the call to action against those running it.

Finally, anti-equality voices attempted and somewhat successfully managed to exploit the visibility of the protest tweeted at #ParliamoneSabato to advance their own agenda. The recurrence of animal-related metaphors in their narratives points to the fact that politicians were not far off the mark when protesting against the dehumanizing character of the discussion at *Parliamone... Sabato*. On the one hand, these voices attempted to shift the discussion away from sexism on television and towards a possible law surrogate motherhood, perhaps in response to the (at the time) recently passed law on same-sex civil unions. On the other hand, they complained about 'reverse racism', pointing to a not-so-latent discomfort with growing diversity. Combining the two, anti-equality voices ultimately betray anxiety in the face of changes that they perceive as existential threats to the viability of their lifestyles.

Conclusion

The protest tweeted at #ParliamoneSabato emerged from the affective reaction of the public to what was perceived as a particularly outrageous case of sexism and racism on public media broadcasting. The protest seemed to hold RAI television network and TV hostess Paola Peregò responsible, possibly characterizing it as a protest aimed at 'the few'. Despite

this, the prominence of previously existing opinion leaders and the narrowness of the user base involved make it hard to interpret the protest as staged by 'the many' and thus as an act of synoptic resistance by a self-organizing network. The different actors involved in the protest deployed a wide array of strategies to argue for the shutting down of the show in object. Interestingly, many of these arguments betrayed the anxieties of the Italian public for growing diversity in the country, manifest in the intertwining of sexism and racism in commentary over gender issues in Italy. Finally, it is worth noticing that the protest might have originate online, but promptly traveled to the analogue realm with the staging of a physical protest orchestrated by the 'Non una di meno' network. Further research should explore the dynamic relationship between online and offline mobilization in the Italian context and beyond. In this sense, a methodology such as the one presented in this study can be one among many ways of approaching online text as a form of social mobilization without losing sight of the relevance of material structures and activities underlying and structuring its production, circulation, and reception. 📖

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Public Space in Morocco; a History of Gender Segregation

FATIMA OUARYACHI

Abstract

In this article, I examine the division of space in private and public spheres according to gender in the context of present day Morocco. One of the many male-dominated spaces in Moroccan society is the Café culture, which in turn has implications for the male domination of the public sphere as a whole. The café not only occupy the actual part of an area but also creates a purely male territory where women are often not welcomed. Any women's attempt to trespass into this territory is an exception that is in some cases can amount to cultural suicide. This article investigates parts of the history of Moroccan women's attempt to reclaim public spaces, which can be said to coincide with the first phase of women movement. This article also attempts to create a link with the conceptualization of Harem as a historical and physical limitation to women's access to public space. The article will trace this limitations back to the first Moroccan family law adopted in 1947, which only confirmed the traditional role of women and men. It will be argued that the last modification of the law in 2004 finally gave more rights to women.

Keywords:

space, women, harem, café culture, family law, Morocco.

Space has always been a non-negotiable property that is divided by gender. Moreover, the division of private and public spheres can sometimes be claimed and dominated by one gender; public space mainly dedicated to men, while the private firmly dedicated to women. The laws that define space are often more strict and visible in some Muslim countries. Despite of these countries rich and different histories, it seems that gender based segregation of space is a common ground. To date, women in Morocco still find themselves unwelcome and in strange situations when they are outside, with no male companion. Public spaces like cafés, public swimming pools, the mosque and street corners near shops are the examples of the places one can list as male-dominated spaces, while the private sphere is purely for women. In fact, even if women have the freedom to access public spheres of schools, public bath, the house is where they have to return. So, what is behind this division? Where does it originate from?

Researching this topic in the Moroccan context is very tricky. The country has multiple aspects (religion-ethnicity) which make situation varies in different parts of the country. This paper however, will attempt to explain one aspect of male-dominated spaces in nowadays-Moroccan society (especially in the social context of small towns and residential suburbs of big cities). Furthermore, it will investigate some of the factors that may have influenced the creation of the private-public binary.

Café Culture

Café culture in Morocco is a visible form of public space dominated by males especially in small towns and residential suburbs of big cities. A modern Moroccan proverb says: 'between every café and a café, there is a café'. Therefore, the domination gets more extensive and the relationship between power and space

is intensified. Not only are woman unwelcome in cafes, they are blatantly exposed to these forbidden places whenever they are outside. What does that mean for space division and what are the aspects of this phenomenon?

A café usually has a space inside the building and a big terrace outside that occupies the sidewalks. For a clear illustration, Said Graiouid¹ describes the café terrace as often set on the sidewalk and is usually composed of at least two rows of tables, though city legislation limits the display of tables outside café to one row. The first observation to be made is that it is a common practice for terrace users to set their chairs facing the street. When a group of five friends or more visits the café there is usually a discreet competition among them about who would take the seats facing the street. Giving one's back to the street means that one is missing out on the street show (Graiouid, 2007)

The dominations of the café culture not only occupy the actual part of an area but also creates a purely male territory where women are often not welcomed. Cafes are filled with men only. Any women's attempt to trespass into this territory is an exception and social (and cultural) suicide. Graiouid adds: "...cafe or other public spaces are predominantly male spatial practices. They secure the male's material, spiritual and psychological comfort and, thus, guarantee his continuity in space and time." (Graiouid, 2004, 4). Therefore, to secure this male territory, female café goers are aware of the male gaze that surround them from inside and outside the café. This act, of sitting on a café terrace, put women under the

judgmental gazes of the other women passing by the café. Therefore, as Graiouid confirms, women are more self-conscious about their café experience than their male counterparts. (Graiouid, 2007)

Like curious spectators, men sit on café terraces to monitor the street show. This setting creates a power relation between the dominant male café goers and the passing by women and reproduces the unequal power relations which prevail in society. In a post-traditional Morocco, where Moroccans strive to be modern, women are still guided by unwritten rules and unspoken social etiquettes. This setting effects a certain women's behavior that includes walking faster with head down or looking in a different direction to avoid eye contact with the male observers. Some women cross the street when getting close to a café, or in the worst case, change their entire route and go through narrow sub-streets, which in turn wastes time and exposes them to certain dangers, for ex. theft.

So, how did cafés become a place where men monitor and control the existence of women in public spaces? When did the dichotomy between public and private public starts, and or where does it originate from? Which factors do contribute to women occupying the domestic sphere and making it their own?

Women going public

Since the beginning of patriarchal societies, where men dominated, women always came together to overcome the restricting patriarchal conventions. Morocco is no exception. Urban women waved the flag of feminism in the 1930 as a tool their emancipation, from both the colonizers and from the strict oppressing traditions. By associating their emancipation with the freedom of the country, women's movement started together with the freedom movement, a movement of resistance against the French and the Spanish colonizers.

The two leading parties, Istiqlal Party (Independence Party), and Shura and Independence Party created a women's group associated with the party that triggered the first legalized/institutionalized women's movement, which, without a doubt, was one of the very first formal ways that women demanded access the public spaces.

But how did this first movement start and how relevant is it to the space division?

It is a fact that Morocco encountered the western world because of colonization. The result of this encounter not only shaped the political scene, infrastructure etc. but also introduced the way the 'other' men and women lived. It must have been a shock for the Moroccan men to learn that the French and the Spanish men only had one wife. However, I would assume that it was a shock followed by pity. Nevertheless, for women, it might have been a shock combined with envy that the foreign woman could exercise the personal freedom. She could go out, and she could have a husband for herself instead of sharing him with three or more other women. These two worlds met together; the one that launched its first wave of feminism since the 18th century², and the second being conquered that kept its women indoor. The collision, of these vastly different worlds; one holding a colonial agenda explain the uprising of the resistance movement.

The French protectoral system in Morocco started in 1912. Under the same goal, men and women collaborated to resist colonialism and demanded their freedom. Women's involvement in the political scene with the first two political parties that were created in the 1930s and 1940s took two forms: Women Section of Istiqlal Party and

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² Here referring mainly to De Gouges Olympe text: *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and Citizen* (1791, September 5).

AkhawatSafaAssociation – in affiliation to Shura and Independence Party – led by HabibaJasous.

Women Section of Istiqlal Party was founded in the 1940s in the midst of the struggle of the national movement to resist protectoral system. Their demands were to raise an official request to the king of the country to demand secondary education for girls; and opening the higher corps at the University of the Qaraouine in front of women. Fields of work were focused on education of girls in several private schools; charity work that targeted families of resistance fighters and sons of resistance martyrs. Political struggle involved creating secret cells to organize the work of women, strengthen their political consciousness, and prepare them to play roles in resisting the colonizer. Accomplishments of this entity included women's presence in public space was more accepted; girls' access to school and lack of opposition in the past has challenged girls' right to education and their contribution to political action. (Benoakrim, 2017)

While the Women Section of Istiqlal Party initiated the demands for girls' education and involvement in the public sphere, AkhawatSafa Association raised more awareness women's rights. This association was created in 1947, in affiliation with Shura and Istiqlal Party. Through intervention with raising awareness of women's rights, giving literacy classes to women and charity work, this organization was able gradually to make public schools and universities accessible for pre and post-independence generation (Benoakrim, 2017). AkhawatSafa continued its work during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. During The Moroccan Women's Conference that took place in Fez in 1984, AkhawatSafa Organization presented a report that included a major defense boost for women in public against harassment: "due to the corrupted ethics in Morocco, our country,

many women in the street are exposed to men that have no ethics! To throw obscene words at women's ears without having anyone to stop them from doing so. We see that the conference had to submit a special report about this matter to his Majesty and to every Bacha (representative of the king in every small town and city) in every city so they work to keep women's dignity and stop whoever expose her to any harm". (Ma'aninou, 1996)

In the same year when this association was created, King Mohammed V gave an important speech in Tanger (on 9th of April 1947) which was an important milestone in Morocco's road to regaining its independence (Loftus, 2014). He was followed by his daughter Princess Aicha, who he delivered a speech inciting Moroccan women to occupy in the political sphere and fight for their freedom, alongside with the men (London, 2016). The media described the speech as the one "that emancipated women" what transformed into myth that still influences history and made good material for the media when it comes to talking about the emancipation of women. ". she hosted women emancipation movement in Morocco, (after) she immediately took the floor after her august father" (Sar Lalla Aicha, 2011). Indeed, the speech was unique, the princess not only was the first royal female family member to speak to the public, but she also did it without a veil, in front of an audience of men and heavily veiled women.

The cover of the Time Magazine, on November 11, 1957 shows a portrait of princess Aicha with no veil and wearing a modern shirt, while at the back a veiled woman is wearing a traditional dress. Both women are looking towards a different direction. Yet, both women are wearing dresses with similar design. Looking at the portrait closely can indeed help us to understand that days of the traditional are to be left behind. But what will happen to the Harem?

Harem

'A woman goes out – of a house – twice in her lifetime: once from her parents' to her husband's house and last to her grave' is a strong yet bizarre statement one can understand if put in the right context: harem.

The term 'harem' can simply be defined as a space dedicated to women in a house in old times where wives, daughters and female servants stay. This way of life is not exclusive to Morocco nor to the certain time era. Its root goes deeper into ancient cultures. Though it is as ancient as the Greeks, you can still sense it in today's world: women spaces and men's spaces and the continuous struggles of breaking into the dominant 'male' territories. How influential was the harem on space division, and, is it still relevant today?

In one's imagination and thinking, harem is a sacred place where no men are allowed, except for other women, or close relatives or the father, brothers uncles, and nephews. In her book: *Are You Vaccinated Against the Harem?*, Moroccan writer Fatima Mernissi, defines the word Harem 'as what is forbidden or somewhere holy that requires specific and strict laws to enter'. Harem is a spatial concept that separated space in two: indoor female space, hidden and forbidden to all men except the master (the husband), and an outdoor space open to all men except women (2004). It is worth mentioning that the harem only existed within urban areas among high-class and rich families, where the man –the master – could afford having more than one wife, multiple odalisques, and servants, a house with the specific space and structure.

In the reflections from her visit to Morocco in 1910s, Edith Wharton wrote:

It is rare, in Morocco, to see in the streets or the bazaars any women except of the humblest classes, household slaves, servants, peasants from the country or small tradesmen's

wives; and even they (with the exception of the unveiled Berber³ women) are wrapped in the prevailing (Wharton, 1920)

In Morocco, where life, on the whole, seems so much less joyful and brightly-tinted; and the women of the richer classes, mercantile or aristocratic, never leave their harems except to be married or buried...

The demands of women for their inclusion into public spaces and equality can encounter rejection, refusal, and sometimes persuasion from some men that hold tightly the belief that women are supposed to stick to their role, and remain in the private sphere. Harem concept took a slightly psychological turn when Mernissi called it a disease, as a residue from Middle Ages, attacking men and inspiring them to see their partners as an odalisques, even if they were equally modern and successful. This presence of the harem is not visible in developing countries only, but also in the countries that considered themselves 'developed'. In fact, the more the country inspires to be developed, the more arrogant it becomes, the stronger the harem disease sticks (Mernissi, 2004). She continues that this disease awakens in men, deeply hidden dreams of having three women to spoil him, even if one woman is greatly satisfying him in reality. It also awakens the desire to have a passive, obedient and silent wife, even if she is highly educated and successful (Mernissi, 2004). This multilayered deep desire is a key factor for patriarchal behaviors and the source of private-public dichotomies that we still experience in all aspects of modern day life. So can one be vaccinated against the harem disease, and how far can this disease affects women access to the public sphere?

Harem realm started to fade succeeding Morocco's independence, due to numerous

³ Berbers or Amazighs (Imazighn) are an ethnic group indigenous to North Africa.

factors, for instance the (timid) women's movement, French/Spanish style of living, education, the creation of many office jobs and rural migration. It is important to study these factors to get greater insight into this phenomenon. Nevertheless, one should conclude that the harem gradually disappeared in Morocco leaving behind that patriarchal culture.

Women and family code

The family is the backbone of any social structure. It deeply engraves certain man-made systems which contributes to the overall institutionalized ones. Through constant changes that occur within these small and big structures, the new norms and rules effect not only its members, but also the spatial area. Through different religious and culturally based laws, social systems to create family codes that help create a structure to either organize or limit people's freedoms and their rights. How does the family code influence Moroccan family structure? Who made these codes and what was it based on? What has it brought to women? What impact has it made on public-private dichotomy?

After gaining independence in 1956, Morocco quickly institutionalized the first family law. Rachid Zizaoui⁴ clarifies that 'Morocco did not have a legislative framework regulating the field of personal and the family; it was regulated according to the provision of Islamic law and also according to the customs' (Zizaoui, 2016). The newly returned king suggested to formulate a law that draws on the provision of Islam sharia laws, Islamic jurisprudence in the field of the family, and through traditions and customs. The committee dedicated to this mission adopted modern sciences, such as sociology, psychology, and use

of statistics to strengthens their conclusions of the need to lift of the damage Moroccan women and ensure the stability of the family. In fact, the committee consisted of ten men that were chosen from high religious authorities and important employees from the ministry of justice (Mernissi, 2005). However, none of the instructions were respected, and the law was decided after only three meetings of the committee (Zizaoui, 2016). With the absence of women in the committee, how objective were these men?

The family code of 1957 caused great disappointment for women's movement. In her masterpiece *Beyond the Veil* (1973), Fatima Mernissi explains that this code came as a confirmation of the traditional family role as a reproductive unit restricting on women freedoms. Mernissi not only questions the objectivity of the committee who constructed the law, but also that how social and economic factors influenced laws on women's right to work. You can easily imagine the form of conflict and tension that resulted from women persistence to work when an Islamic community suffers from unemployment. Every society that is unable to create job positions for its members chooses to return to tradition that denies the work for women and only limits them to sex objects. That is exactly what happened in Morocco after independence in 1956/1957. In Article number 115 in 1957 family law: People's expenditure is on themselves; except for the wives, their expenditure is on their husbands. Therefore, women's right to work clearly cannot be accomplished according to the law being based on the illusion of care and attempt to nourish the traditional image of the family: the masculinity as the power source of economy, and femininity as the passive consumerist force.

Other articles in 1957 family code asserted constraining woman to the private sphere and allowed her spouse to decide when she

can enter the public sphere. "A woman has the right to visit her parents, but only when her husband approves". (art. 35) Though the Moroccan institution endorses gender equality, as both men and women fall under the category of "citizens", it did not give women the rights for to go out, and therefore, obtain a job. In fact, the law "confirms" that a woman should negotiate those rights with her husband.

The first family law had a big influence on the women rights in Morocco. Without a doubt, although it had been modified several times, this law has not made a dramatic change in regards of women's situation. However, with the recently modified law of 2004, women were taken by surprise. The two most argued articles, about the expenditure and taking permission from a spouse to go out, were dropped out. Article 24, women were given the right to marry themselves without needing a guardian, in article 78, a woman has the right to divorce her husband, and article 51 declares both man and woman are responsible for the housework and looking after the children. (Family Code, 2016). How influential was this on women's confidence? Moreover, is it enough to create a generation of independent women?

Conclusion

Breaking the walls of the traditional family was not an easy task as well as the independence from France and Spain. Women participated in the independence movement in the 1930 and 1940s, along with men as a form of solidarity, and as their emancipation attempt. As a part of Women Section of Istiqlal Party or part of AkhawatSafa association, women's involvement included educating women and getting them to be politically involved and gain the right for women to enter public spaces. However, their participation in the independence movement was not a major breaking point for women's emancipation. The first

family law adopted in 1947 only confirmed the traditional role of women and men. Only with the last modification in 2004, the law gave more rights for women. Therefore, escaping the harem to a post-traditional Morocco was not an easy task.

In a culture where gender relations are mapped along strict spatial boundaries, the social setting of the café acts as a metaphor. The dominant interpretations of gender relations are constantly contested and renegotiated. In fact, observing this power relation is not a difficult mission, and does not even require gender sensitive lenses. Coming myself from a small town in Morocco, I see our relation to public space for women – as a complex and a challenging issue. One must admit that entering the public space is more accessible in modern Morocco; however, it comes with unspoken restrictions. In order to normalize their presence in public spaces women need to adapt, renegotiate and overcome, in their own ways, the complex restrictions enforced on them. 🗨️

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Objectification of Women in China. Chosen Examples from Women's Writing

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Abstract

The article presents the problem of objectification of Chinese women throughout past to the present times. Objectification of women in China can be regarded as total phenomenon, since it regarded control over feminine bodies, will and spirit. Since birth, women were strictly controlled and socialised accordingly. According to Confucian principles men were also supposed to show subordination to their fathers, superiors and rulers, however, looking from historical perspective, it is clear that subordination of women permeated patriarchal Chinese society so deeply, that it took the form of objectification that influenced traditions, customs and mentality of the inhabitants of the Middle Kingdom.

Keywords:

objectification of women, subordination of women, China, women in China.

Introduction

Objectification of women is a large-scale phenomenon, present in many cultures, expressed by various practices subordinating women. In this article I am going to write about objectification of a very specific group of women – namely, Chinese women.

I am going to bring examples of objectifying practices taken from women's literature, written by either Chinese women or female writers closely connected to China. The authors come from a wide time span extending from 19th to 21st century, coming from various backgrounds – some of them were born and spent their childhood in China – just like Jung Cheng, author of her family's history *Wild Swans*, an international best-seller banned in the People's Republic of China. Others, like Lisa See, descend from Chinese immigrants, thousands of whom were coming to the USA in the 19th century in search for better lives. Or, like the Pulitzer and Nobel Prize winner, Pearl S. Buck, daughter of missionaries, lived in China for many years, thoroughly observing and describing Chinese society, advocating for women rights, fighting against discrimination and undertaking humanitarian actions.

The work of authors who have themselves been emigrants, or those whose families have experienced the situation of relocation from their original country, can and should be treated as a bridge connecting the double cultural perspective in their narrative. Their writings represent the set of Western values, already internalized by them, but shows that their original ethos still is very important to them – shapes and influences their choices and perception of reality. This double perspective largely determines their reflective and critical consideration of the fate of women in China and is a mediated help for the Western researchers trying to understand the source

culture. Just as Chandra Mohanty recommends – experiences and cultures that the researchers cannot experience or live through themselves, (...) *must be theorized and interpreted within specific societies, both in order to understand it better, as well as in order to effectively organize to change it* (Mohanty, 1984, p. 339). Therefore such novels contain the hidden metacultural voice of the assessment of their own experience that convey information making the research possible.

There are many female authors, that have been writing about objectification of the Chinese women. In this article the reader can find references to works such as *Wild Swans: Three daughters of China* by Jung Chang, *Spring Moon* by Bette Bao Lord, *The Good Earth* by Pearl S. Buck, *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*, *Peony in Love*, *China Dolls*, *Shanghai Girls*, *Dreams of Joy* by Lisa See, to mention a few.

The first part of this article is devoted to the notion of objectification, thoroughly researched by two philosophers Martha C. Nussbaum and Rae H. Langton, with description of objectification's features as related to the objectifying practices performed in China (and described in the women's writing). Further on, the Reader will find reference to the objectifying social and family roles of women as daughters, wives and mothers, mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, and widows, with regard to Confucian philosophy that have been influencing and shaping Chinese society for centuries.

In order to avoid one-dimensional Western assessment of the issue, while maintaining research distance to the presented problem, I am going to combine the perspective characteristic of Western social thought with references to the Chinese cultural tradition.

I believe that this selection of written material is very useful, since it concerns local, contextual analyses and allows avoiding homogenization of the described group, so

the lives of women of China will not create (...) *a false sense of the commonality of oppressions, interests and struggles between and amongst women globally* (Mohanty, 1984, p. 348), but will refer to their particular experience.

1. Definition of objectification

The term *objectification* is prevalent in feminist discourse. The simplest way to explain what objectification is that it occurs when a person is being treated as if she was an object. Thanks to Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin the term *objectification* usually is associated to sexual objectification of women by men – and both of these authors emphasize that this aspect of objectification should be understood as a central problem of feminism, and that this phenomenon should be opposed and fought against (Nussbaum, 1995).

2. Characteristic features of objectification – Martha Nussbaum and Rae Langton

Two philosophers, Martha Nussbaum and Rae Langton have been researching extensively the notion of objectification. Both of them created complementary list of conditions in which objectification takes place. Objectification occurs when some of these conditions are met. It is not necessary for all of these to be fulfilled, yet they may be combined in variety of manners.

Martha Nussbaum distinguished seven conditions of objectification. These are: Instrumentality. Women are treated as instruments, tools or means serving certain aim. This condition has undeniably been met, given the way Chinese females have been treated for many generations. Main role of a woman have been limited to bearing children – especially sons and heirs supporting patrilineal, patrilocal, and patriarchal social order prevailing in China (Ebrey, 2002, pp. 11–12).

A woman who has not given her husband (or master, in case of a concubine) a male offspring was considered as a failure in the eyes of the family and society. Moreover, a son-less mother should despise her own failure and try to amend for it, by serving her husband and his family, humbly bearing her shame and insufficiency. The need for having male heirs, especially in upper class families, justified polygamy. Man not only could have a number of wives, he could also take concubines and have sex with maids and servants, which made the family relations quite complex and perplexing. (...) *The Chen Family Villa was home to 940 fingers: 210 fingers belonged to my direct blood relatives, 330 fingers to the concubines and their children – all girls – and another 400 fingers to our cooks, gardeners, wet nurses, amahs, maids, and the like.* (See, 2007, p. 46). If the wife had no children of her own, she could raise son of a concubine, who could be given every possible chance to carry on the family traditions. (Ebrey, 2002, p. 103).

Passivity and inertia. Chinese women could not make any decisions concerning their wellbeing or happiness. They were to obediently and meekly follow their superiors. It concerned weighty decisions, like marriage as well as everyday activities. It is clearly seen in the example of Peony (heroine of the novel *Peony in Love* by Lisa See) – whatever the decision her father took about her marriage, she would not express her feelings, but suffer it in silence. *„I'm a girl. (...) I believe in filial duty," I said, "and I will follow the course my father has set for me, but all girls have dreams, even if our destinies are set"* (See, 2007, p. 39). Filial duty (...) *was and still is a value based on strict principles of hierarchy, obligation and obedience. It is no exaggeration to say that it was the very foundation of the hierarchical structure of the Chinese family and thus of the Chinese society as a whole* (Teon, 2016). Filial duty made women passive,

this is why they were to follow the rules, giving up their hopes, dreams and ambitions. There was nothing that they could do:

"You married out," Mama said, in a way that seemed oddly detached. "You go to another village. Your mother-in-law is cruel. Your husband doesn't care for you. We wish you would never leave, but every daughter marries away. Everyone agrees. Everyone goes along with it. You can cry and beg to come home, we can grieve that you have gone, but you – and we – have no choice. The old saying makes this very clear: 'If a daughter doesn't marry out, she's not valuable; if fire doesn't raze the mountain, the land will not be fertile.' (See, 2005, p. 79).

Denying autonomy. For centuries Chinese women were denied possibility of making decisions concerning their lives. Decisions concerning marriage, love and sexual life, and even bodily autonomy (either foot binding practice taking place in the past centuries, or compulsory abortions imposed by the communist regime in more recent times), were made by their superiors: in the feudal era – by the father of the family, and during communist era – by the local party secretary, head of the village or cooperative. Life consisted of constant obedience. Just like Snow Flower's mother was saying during the foot binding procedure: *We must follow the Four Virtues and the Three Obedience's. Remember, when a daughter, obey your father; when a wife, obey your husband; when a widow, obey your son. Your husband is Heaven, she said, quoting the Classic of Filial Duty for Girls* (See, 2007, p. 95).

Interchangeability. If a woman could not bear a male offspring to her husband, it would be expected of him to take another wife or a concubine. Sometimes a man would even take maids to his bed in order to produce desired sons. Philosophy underlying this kind

of action was that if one woman would not fulfil her duty, another would. It was accepted to simply use another tool serving the same function. Exchanging one part of machinery (in this case meaning family and inheritance) does not influence its overall functioning and effectiveness.

Ownership and possession. A woman was a commodity that belonged to her family. After being married, she was removed from her father's custody and transferred like a product to her husband's family. Girls could and would be purchased or sold, if need arose. They were treated as merchandise and sometimes as investment. In times when family had debts to pay, giving the daughter away to the creditor could settle the obligation. This kind of situation is described by Lisa See in her novel *Shanghai Girls* – when Pearl and May learn about their father's gambling debts, that could be paid with his two beautiful daughters:

"I lost to Old Man Louie," Baba grudgingly admits at last. "He'll let your mother and me stay in the house if May marries the younger son and you marry the older son. We'll have a roof to sleep under and something to eat until I get work. You, our daughters, are our only capital" (See, 2009, p. 16).

Violability. Violability seems to be inscribed into the very definition of woman. They are fragile, delicate – due to foot binding practice, they lose their independency. Even few steps are such a painful experience, that they cannot even walk unassisted. Swaying movements, relying on the assistance of men or servants made a woman a fragile, decorative object, valuable and precious, yet very delicate. Possession of such objects defined male's high status in society. Just like art collectors, rich and powerful men would possess a number of delicate wives and concubines that

would please their senses and tastes. Andrea Dworkin writes:

"The Lady, unable to walk, remained properly invisible in her boudoir, an ornament, weak and small, a testimony to the wealth and privilege of the man who could afford to keep her – to keep her idle. Doing no manual labor, she did not need her feet either. Only on the rarest of occasions was she „allowed outside of the incarcerating walls of her home, and then only in a sedan chair behind heavy curtains." (Dworkin, 1974, pp. 130–131).

Another example of inscribing violability and fragility to women can be found in Xue Xinran's book *Miss Chopsticks*: the father of the heroines declares, that women by definition can be compared to a pair of chopsticks – because they can break just as easily as kitchen utensils: (...) *women are merely fragile, workaday tools, to be used and then discarded* (Xinran, 2008, p. 1). Moreover, it seems obvious, that by ascribing fragility to women, patriarchal system made them believe that statement – so they would not dare to seek out their strength.

Denial of subjectivity. A woman is denied the right to decide for herself – because she lacks good judgement. How can a little girl know, that foot binding is actually good for her? This is why others (wiser, older and more experienced) have to make such decisions „for her own good". Peony's mother explains it these words:

Our footbinding helps us to be softer, more languid, smaller." She paused again, and then added, in a kinder but no less adamant tone, "I will show you how this is done. I expect you to do this for your daughter four days from now. Every four days, tighter and tighter. Give your daughter the gift of your mother love. Do you understand?" (See, 2007, p. 95).

Choosing husbands for daughters was also the matter appropriate for fathers, who actively participate in social, economical and political spheres of life. Peony from *Peony in Love* did not suspect, that her father might actually have had regard her feelings, since majority of Chinese fathers were gain oriented and did not hold their daughters in such esteem as to incline to their hearts' desires.

The above list of seven characteristics of objectification has been extended by philosopher Rae H. Langton, who added three more traits. In her opinion, Nussbaum's description of objectification will make a full picture only after we add the following features:

Reduction to body. That condition is undoubtedly met: women in China can be seen as reduced to their bodies according to their utility: their bodies have to serve one purpose: bearing sons.

We women are expected to love our children as soon as they leave our bodies, but who among us has not felt disappointment at the sight of a daughter or felt the dark gloom that settles upon the mind even when holding a precious son, if he does nothing but cry and makes your mother-in-law look at you as though your milk were sour? (See, 2005, p. 59).

Reduction to appearance. Females should be pleasing to the eye. Thus life in the female pavilions was mostly devoted to taking great care of beauty, designing new hairdos, arranging clothes and jewellery in exquisite combinations. Ladies were speaking in a delightful, sweet manner. Women with bound golden-lily feet were walking in a swaying manner, emphasising their frailty. The foot binding practice served purpose of proving the high status – both of the bride's family (who managed to bring up a delicate lady) and

the bridegroom's family (who could afford to have a woman unable to do chores and physical work):

Foot size would determine how marriageable I was. My small feet would be offered as proof to my prospective in-laws of my personal discipline and my ability to endure the pain of childbirth, as well as whatever misfortunes might lie ahead. My small feet would show the world my obedience to my natal family, particularly to my mother, which would also make a good impression on my future mother-in-law. The shoes I embroidered would symbolize to my future in-laws my abilities at embroidery and thus other house learning. And, though I knew nothing of this at the time, my feet would be something that would hold my husband's fascination during the most private and intimate moments between a man and a woman. (See, 2005, p. 34).

Muting and silencing. Even if women dared to complain and express their dissatisfaction and unhappiness, they would be silenced, and their opinions not taken seriously. When Jung Chang's grandmother learned that her father arranged for her to become General Xue's concubine just a few days before the arranged liaison, she:

bent her head and wept. She hated the idea of being a concubine, but her father had already made the decision, and it was unthinkable to oppose one's parents. To question a parental decision was considered unfilial and to be unfilial was tantamount to treason. Even if she refused to consent to her father's wishes, she would not be taken seriously; her action would be interpreted as indicating that she wanted to stay with her parents. The only way to say no and be taken seriously was to commit suicide. (Jung Chang, 2003, p. 13).

As it was mentioned before, it is enough if only one or some of these characteristics occur in order to speak about objectification. But it is clear, that women of China suffered the whole range of objectifying practices, and all of these characteristics have been taking place.

3. Factors determining objectification of women in China

Objectification of women in China can be regarded as total, since it included control over feminine bodies, will and spirit. Since birth, women were strictly controlled and socialised accordingly. What influenced such subordination of the female population? We may distinguish four following factors: environment, expectations, education and tradition.

Environment. By environment I understand society and family (influenced by society), financial status of the family and social class. All of these contributed to and facilitated objectification of women. Society approved of restricting women to the female pavilions, and thus imposed certain roles upon them, so they would be able to devote their energy and time only to activities allowed to and proper for women. Since women would not have access to hunting equipment, but to needles and thread, they would make embroideries; ladies with tiny bound feet, incapacitated of physical activity and work would have devote their life to childrearing and childcare, intrigues and competition for being favourite of the husband (or master). (...) We entered this house as wives, playthings, entertainment, and servants (See, 2011, p. 416) recalls Yong from the Green Dragon village, who as one of many wives, had to agree with the fact, that despite marrying out of love she would have had to share her husband with other women.

Expectations. In Chinese society men and older generations had considerable power over women and younger generations (Ebrey, 2002, p. 12). Girls and women were subordinate to the whole hierarchy consisting of older women and, ultimately, men. Even if loved and cherished, daughters were expected to marry men chosen by their fathers, become concubines to important men, accept being sold as maids or courtesans, in other words – sacrifice their happiness and lives to the benefit of their families.

Education. Women were not educated for their own merit, education was understood rather as a form of investment: the higher the price on the marital market, the better. Certain qualities and education were favoured, but a wife should have never exceeded her husband's learning and knowledge. Jung Chang describes how her great grandfather, wanted his daughter to be trained as a lady or a high-class courtesan, therefore:

Scorning the received wisdom of the time – that it was virtuous for a lower class woman to be illiterate – he sent her to a girl's school that had been set up in the town in 1905. She also learned to play Chinese chess, mahjongg, and go. She studied drawing and embroidery. Her favourite design was mandarin ducks (which symbolize love, because they always swim in pairs), and she used to embroider them onto the tiny shoes she made for herself. To crown her list of accomplishments, a tutor was hired to teach her to play the qin, a musical instrument like a zither (Chang, 2003, pp. 6–7).

It is important to mention, that education of men who studied overseas finally influenced emancipation of women and helped to prepare ground for freeing them from many inhibitions. After returning to China from abroad,

such men, when becoming husbands and fathers often forbidden practices, such as foot binding, imposed by tradition on their wives and daughters. Men started the anti-foot binding movement (...) by founding so-called natural feet societies in which they enrolled their daughters or to which they swore allegiance by refusing to marry, or have their sons marry, women with bound feet (Dooling, 2005, p. 21).

Tradition. Life according to four virtues and three obediences. Tradition was held in high esteem: living the way ancestors did, doing things the way they have always been done – was certainly valued. Tradition tied women to their families, and made them servants whose only objective was obediently fulfilling the needs and demands of their elders.

According to the principles of Confucianism, a woman should follow the path of four virtues, and thus she should:

- ▶ lead a moral life,
- ▶ distinguish herself by a proper speech, modest manners and appearance
- ▶ be diligent at work.
- ▶ In addition, by complying to the rule of filial piety she should also follow the order of three obediences. It means that she should show obedience three times:
 - ▶ first, as a daughter to her father,
 - ▶ then as a wife to her husband,
 - ▶ and finally – as a widow – to her sons.

One could say, that it should not be surprising, given the fact that Confucianism, provided a view of the cosmos and social order that legitimated the Chinese patriarchal society and family system. (...) Confucian emphasis on obligations to patrilineal ancestors and Confucian exaltation of filial piety contributed to a moral order in which families were central to human identity and to a family system organized hierarchically (Ebrey, 2002, pp. 11–12) where women and young people were subordinated to older

generations and older men. In the light of the Confucian principles men were also supposed to show subordination to their fathers, superiors and rulers. However, even the smallest and lowest ranking men were superior to women.

4. Women's place in the family order

The history of Chinese women is related to the history of the Chinese family (Ebrey, 2002, p. 7). Lives of women were shaped by (...) elements of family and marriage practice, such as the age at which they married, how their spouses were selected, where they lived after marriage, their access to property, the choices open to them if widowed, and the like. (Ebrey, 2002, p. 7). Moreover, the concept of filial piety permeating Chinese society and rule of three obediences limited women's subjectivity and decision making. Serving the family, was the main objective and duty of a faithful daughter, obedient wife and honourable widow. In this paragraph I am going to describe duties and expectations put on daughters, wives and mothers, daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law and widows.

Daughters. Since their birth daughters were traditionally treated as „useless branches“, bringing their families nothing but source of sorrow and exertion. Since it was important to marry daughters off, they were not expected to stay in their natal houses. Thus the efforts parents would put in upbringing their daughters and preparing dowries would finally merit their husbands' families. (...) *We love our parents because they take care of us, but we are considered worthless branches on the family tree. We drain the family resources. We are raised by one family for another* (See, 2005, p. 59).

If not successfully married, daughters could also be treated as a form of commodity, often they were sold as concubines or maids to wealthier families, or as prostitutes to pleasure houses.

If the family fell into trouble, parents would get rid of their daughters (as if they were unnecessary ballast), thus female infants were often killed. Female infanticide (...) *was extremely prevalent in the Song Dynasty – being greatly influenced by the philosophy of Neo-Confucianism which denied women basic human rights, including the right to live* (See, 2005, p. 59). In *The Good Earth* Wang Lung's wife, O-lan, got pregnant and gave birth to a daughter during terrible famine. From the bruises on the infant Wang saw that O-lan has strangled the baby because she could not feed her (Buck, 2005). Female infanticide in the areas stricken by natural disasters or poverty led to shortage of girls on the marital market. The same problem is noticed nowadays, since the one-child-policy imposed on a deeply patriarchal society led to extremely large number of aborting female fetuses.

Daughters could also have been sold as if they were merchandise: as servants, maids or slaves, and from that moment their fate would completely depend on the new family that bought them. Plum Blossom, a slave girl living in the house of Chang family, after being promised as a concubine to Old Yeh laments:

Even after my father sold me and sent me away, I dreamed every night that if I were good-natured and worked hard the Matriarch would wed me to a young artisan from town or to the son of a clan retainer. I dreamed that we would be well matched and have sons. I would have a home and my rightful place as a daughter-in-law, wife and mother (Lord, 2004, p. 17).

Wives and mothers. Young wife entering her husband's family had two important tasks. One of them was to bear sons – since her position depended on her ability to do so and numbers of sons she could give to her husband's clan. If she failed to fulfil this obligation,

she was losing her social value and place in the family hierarchy. The other task was to loyally serve his husband and his parents. As Snow Flower puts it:

My duty as my husband's wife was to his parents above all else. To serve them did not just mean bringing them tea in the morning, washing their clothes, or accepting criticism with a smiling face. Serving them meant that I should esteem them above everyone else – above my parents, above my husband, above my children (See, 2005, p. 180).

After marriage, young wives could slowly work their way up through the family hierarchy, by trying to win approval of their in-laws, (...) *working within the system and thereby also helping to validate it and reproduce it* (Ebrey, 2002, p. 13). Apart from becoming mothers, they also played active roles in supporting the system:

Mothers trained their daughters to occupy certain statuses in this system, fostering in them the modesty expected of upper-class wives, the charm expected in courtesans, the obedience expected in maids. Women purchased most of the maids and many of the concubines. A wife whose husband took a concubine could to some degree limit or shape her husband's behaviour by arousing fears of what she might do to the other woman if sufficiently provoked (Ebrey, 2002, p. 13).

Wives were not for pleasure – that was the role of concubines. Even though concubines could become considerably powerful, their social status was quite different from that of a wife. As Jung Chang says (...) *a concubine was a kind of institutionalized mistress, acquired and discarded at will* (Chang, 2003, p. 13).

Mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. The relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law often was full of tension and involved conflict. Some mothers-in-law used to tyrannise their daughters-in-law, taking advantage of their hierarchical position which allowed them to do so unrestrained. Daughter-in-law was always subordinate to her mother-in-law, and finally to her father-in-law. Her function was to help her husband fulfil his duties towards his parents. She literally belonged to her husband's family, and had to serve and please her in-laws:

We are told to love our in-laws, but we enter those families as strangers, as the lowest person in the household, just one step on the ladder above a servant. We are ordered to love and honor our husbands' ancestors, so we perform the proper duties, even if our hearts quietly call out gratitude to our natal ancestors (See, 2005, p. 59).

Bound by the concept of filial duty, the husband should always take the side of his mother, not of his wife, because of his obligations towards parents and continuation the family lineage.

Additionally, the mothers-in-law could be seen and act as a guardians of the patriarchal system. As the highest ranking females in the family system, their duty was to maintain the family order, care for the clan's ancestors and keeping their families in good shape. Daughters-in-law could hope to eventually become mothers-in-law and become as much powerful as their own mothers-in-law have been, and continue their tasks.

Widows. A respected and respectful widow should:

- ▶ lead modest and decent life;
- ▶ forget any thoughts of marrying again;

► serve the family, namely her sons, her late husband's male relatives and her in-laws.

Widows were supposed to remain in celibacy after their husbands' demise. A virtuous widow would remain unmarried and continue being of service to her family, her reward was the support the family had given her in exchange. Loyalty towards her husband and her new family should reach extremely high point – in many cases widows preferred death instead of uncertain future:

As a widow, I would have very few options. Since my children were too young to take care of me, my father-in-law could sell me away to another man. Knowing that under those circumstances I might never see my children again, I understood why so many widows killed themselves (See, 2005, p. 175).

It was better to become poor or to die, but remain true to her husband, and to keep her virtue, rather than to bring shame on his memory (See, 2005, p. 175). Those widows, who acted accordingly with these principles would be presented as exemplary to other women and girls, just like Peony's grandmother, whose virtue was praised even by her enemies:

The highest goal a woman could achieve in life was to be a chaste widow who would not accept a second marriage, not even if it meant taking her own life. But my grandmother had done something even more extraordinary. She elected to kill herself rather than give herself to the Manchu soldiers. She was such an exemplary example of Confucian chastity that, once the Manchus established the Qing court, they selected her to be venerated in stories and books for women to read, if they hoped to reach perfection themselves as wives and mothers, and to promote the universal ideals of loyalty and filial piety. The Manchus were

still our enemy, but they used my grandmother, and the other women who had sacrificed themselves during the disaster, to win our respect and bring back order to the women's chambers (See, 2007, p. 45).

6. Ghosts of the past. Questions that remain

Convicted by the patriarchal society to live in the shadow and away from the public sphere, women focused on giving birth and upbringing the next generations subordinated to tradition. Objectified women were diligently safeguarding smooth transition and continuation of patriarchal social order. Chinese social and family system could endure for so many centuries because all men and some women enjoyed some degree of power, and even inferior individuals would become superior (Teon, 2016). (...) *In fact, even the poorest of men in China was a king: a king in his own household. He was nothing compared to the Emperor or a Magistrate, but he, too, had some subordinates who had to serve and obey him: his own children and women (Teon, 2016). Even though (...) sons or daughters-in-law were powerless in their youth, when they grew old their turn came to command. Sons would inherit their fathers' role, and daughters-in-law would become mothers-in-law (Teon, 2016).* Not all daughters-in-law could reach that level of power, yet that was the most they could aspire to be.

When we take a closer look at modern-day China, we may ask ourselves the following question: did socio-political changes in China improve the way of treating women? The answer that comes to mind is not very heart warming though. Despite the historical turmoils, revolutions and overturn of social order the patriarchal and feudal traits still permeate the Chinese society. Fighting the remnants of old regime during the Communist era included compulsory unbinding of crippled *lotus feet*:

women with bound feet were going through a process of slowly unbinding their feet (...) *preventing emotional and physical trauma – which would leave them completely crippled – and allowing the feet to regain their original shape gradually so the women can work in the fields (See, 2011, p. 359).* Unfortunately, in many cases the process was forced abruptly, so the women had no the chance to gain physical strength before being sent to fields. They would be stripped of their bandages and forced to walk and work. Women who fell victims of objectification by the old system were still objectified and blamed for being relics of the hated past.

Objectification of women is also visible in one-child-policy: female foetuses are more likely to be aborted. Moreover, women who got pregnant with second child have often been forced to undergo abortion, even if the pregnancies were already advanced – just like in the infamous case of Feng Jianmei, who has been forcibly taken to a county hospital in Shaanxi Province, by the local officials because she and her husband were unable to pay a 40,000 yuan fine for violating the one child policy. Mrs. Feng, seven months pregnant, was forced to thumbprint an agreement to have an abortion, and then was held down while injected with an abortifacient. Mrs. Feng's husband posted graphic pictures of the aborted girl, thus sparking controversy in China and abroad about forced abortions (Wong, 2012).

Another issue is that after the Communists seized power in China, the party leadership positions have never been open for women:

Not once since the Communists came to power in 1949 has a woman sat on the party's highest body, the seven-member Politburo Standing Committee now led by President Xi Jinping. The 25-member Politburo has just two women, though that is the highest number since the Cultural Revolution, when the wives of the Chinese leader Mao Zedong

and of Lin Biao, his designated successor, were given seats in 1969 (Tatlow, 2017).

Although contemporary Chinese women have successfully entered the paths of career and various spheres that in the past were reserved to men, the society still believes in the idea that unmarried woman is lacking in value. Even if remaining single is their own choice, it is understood that they do not have respect for their parents and therefore do not follow the rule of filial duty. This is the reason why people consider them as outcasts. (...) *In 2007, the ministry of education publicly shamed women who were 27 years or older as "leftover women" (Xuan Li, The Conversation, October 11, 2016).* Some parents get so frustrated with the fact that they children are not married that they keep looking for potential spouses at „matchmaking corners“ like the famous Shanghai Marriage Market, where they put ads describing their daughters – giving information about their looks, job and financial status. Still, more of Chinese women are trying to oppose the tradition of arranged, loveless marriages, choosing autonomy over tradition and advocating for securing women's rights.

Chinese society is still a very conservative one, clinging to outdated rules and customs, oblivious that women are human beings and deserve equal treatment. Although the first feminist and equal rights tendencies in China were voiced more than a century ago, the process of securing women's rights is slow and challenging – just like in other parts of the world, because the real change demands not merely introduction of new laws and regulations, but above all it involves shift in mentality and culture. And that requires change of outdated beliefs, customs and traditions deeply and transparently implemented and shaping opinions and worldview. 🗨️

1 The Conversation

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Abstrakt

Artykuł porusza zagadnienie uprzedmiotowienia kobiet w Chinach, w oparciu o wybrane przykłady dzieł literackich autorek chińskich, bądź blisko związanych z Chinami. Uprzedmiotowanie kobiet w Chinach można uznać za zjawisko totalne, ponieważ oznaczało pełną kontrolę nad ciałami, wolą i duchem kobiet. Zgodnie z zasadami konfucjanizmu mężczyźni również podlegali swoim zwierzchnikom (zarówno w hierarchii rodzinnej, jak i politycznej), lecz uprzedmiotowanie kobiet przyjęło znacznie głębszą postać przejawiającą się w tradycji, obyczajach i mentalności mieszkańców Państwa Środka.

Słowa kluczowe: uprzedmiotowanie kobiet, poddaństwo kobiet, Chiny, kobiety w Chinach.



In the Colours of the Rainbow

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book review

Renata Ziemińska

Niebinarne i wielowarstwowe pojęcie płci
(*Non-binary and multilayered concept of sex*)

Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa, 2018

Since the second half of the 20th century, and mainly influenced by the development of feminist theories, the issue of sex/gender diversity¹ has become the topic of broader interest. Available publications on this subject however, are mostly limited to the one field represented by the researcher, whether it is biology/medicine, psychology/psychoanalysis or sociology/anthropology. The work of Renata Ziemińska is unique in this respect – it includes combined disciplines approach to the subject.

The author in very clear, orderly, though not simplifying way, presents and explains complicated issues related to sex/gender diversity. In her book she refers to the latest medical, biological, psychological, legal and the other works. Apart from the references to published researches results, she also uses her own research, conducted at the University of

Leads, and the University of Chicago, during the years 2015–2017. Particularly valuable and interesting is her proposition of a new conceptualization and categorization of the sex/gender phenomenon.

The main intention of the author of the work is to scientifically demonstrate the inadequacy of stereotypical binary sex/gender division, which despite the undeniable findings, still dominates in the social consciousness. The most vivid evidence to deny the prevailing opinions is the existence of relatively large group of people who do not fall within the division. Their status, history and experience are still treated as marginal, “unnatural” and in need of psychological intervention or radical medical correction. Scientific analyses regarding those issues however, are published in strictly professional journals, intended for a group of specialists, and do not reach a wider audience. In the consequence, lack of adequate knowledge leads to the perpetuation of dangerous, because hurtful, opinions and reactions.

The book has been divided into five chapters. In the first chapter Ziemińska presents seven basic layers of sex/gender differentiations, including five regarding biological

¹ In the English language, due to the double meaning of the term “sex”, the term “gender” became commonly used instead, while the term “sex” is reserved for the strictly biological/medical issues. In Polish the problem doesn’t occur, and the choice of the terms depends on the author of the text. In this review, because of Ziemińska complex understanding of the subject of her book, I use combined term: “sex/gender”

characteristics and two psychological. Reproductive roles, sexual orientations, as well as linguistic issues, as not necessary conditions for sex/gender, though closely related, the author describes as secondary layers. And because of the already detailed and demonstrated in scientific researches findings of mosaic, or hybrid nature of the human brain, she does not include this indicator (sex of the brain) in her list of layers of sex/gender differences.

The second chapter discusses the issues of intersex people. In the medical language until recently such people were called DSD (*disorders of sex development*), however, according to the author, in response to numeric protests coming from the directly interested persons, in 2017 the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a statement in which the term "differences" was used in the place of "disorders". When presenting the practices of treating people with unusual sexual characteristics Zieminska introduces, initiated by Miranda Fricker. A useful research tool as well as conceptual framework (mainly for feminist and sociological research) a concept of "*epistemic injury*". According to the Fricker, this phenomenon affects many people due to the multiple racial, gender and age differences, be it in the form of undermining the credibility of their words because of prejudices of the listeners (*injustice of witnessing*), or by ignoring information about their life and experience (*hermeneutic injustice*) depriving those people in this way of their rightful place in culture.

The third chapter has been devoted to the transsexual persons, that is those who feel the incompatibility between their sex/gender identity and the sex/gender assigned to them at birth. This condition in medical terminology is referred to as GID, gender identity disorders, (i.e. still as a mental disorder), although APA has already deleted GID from the list of disorders and in DMSN-5 in its place a less stigmatizing term has been adopted: GD (*gender dysphoria*).

The particularly vital, thought debatable due to its inversible consequences, is the surgical correction of sex (*reassignment*). Such treatments, which are mainly a consequence of adopting stereotypical sexual/gender division, have currently strong supporters as well as strong opponents. Presented by Zieminska the history of sex correction practices in infants and young children gives us a deeper insight into the problematic nature of such interventions undertaken in different countries, both at the explicit request of the child's parents and only on the basis of doctors' assessment.

The fourth chapter discusses sex exams of women in sport, and the history of segregation of players in this respect. New technologies and methods of testing did not provide the expected unquestionable criteria for establishing the boundaries between the sexes, which should also contribute to undermining the common beliefs in its dichotomy.

In the last chapter prof. Zieminska proposes her own conceptualization of sex/gender, which is somehow the realization of Sureja Monro postulate (2005), and complimentary to her theory replacing dichotomous division, by theory of plurality of sex/gender identity. The author of the reviewed book agrees with Monro (and with Judith Butler, among others) that despite of some voices supporting the "world without gender" model, we still need the categorization in this sphere, even if for strategic (political) purposes only.

The poststructuralist feminist/gender theory of the end of 20th century has created an innovative critical position against the tradition of treating a human being as a natural and unchangeable being an approach introducing the model of socially constructed subject (ultimately rejecting essentialism and biological determinism). Focusing on the cultural aspects however, it ignored the adoption of more nuanced considerations taking into account more complex solutions. First of all, it didn't

pay much attention to the materiality of the body², and consequently, didn't construct any sex/gender categorization (a sit opposed to the idea). In spite of the effort made, it did not lead to changes in general public awareness in this area as effectively as be expected.

Until the beginning of the 21st century the biological explanations of gender/transgender was among the feminist questionable and very unpopular. All references to biology/nature were considered as a return to already eliminated (with so much of difficulty) conservative philosophical tradition. The result of such a position was however, omitting or even disregarding the results of researches in natural sciences as not being of the interests of those theoreticians. This situation caused peculiar lack of communication between the natural and social sciences. On the other hand, Zieminska devotes a lot of attention to biological findings, closer to the proposals of New Feminist Materialism.

Zieminska notices the need to build a sex/gender model that would include its diversion on every level, and not only on the level of representation and discourse, as was the case with the feminists' poststructuralists. She states that she decided to simplify the concepts of sex/gender identity pluralism proposed by Monro to three categories: two binary – male and female, and one non-binary – understood as a mix of both. Adopting Monro's pluralism, she makes an adjustment to binary division and includes intersexual individuals of different varieties. As previously mentioned, each of three categories has been divided into layers: seven basics, including five biological and two psychological and social. The non-binary category includes people from

the spectrum of masculinity and femininity. Additionally, typical categories of women and man have been supplemented by two atypical ones, justifying and documenting the nature of the sex/gender phenomenon as process, spectrum or continuum.

The author achieved the intended goal of her book. By presenting and explaining the findings of the latest scientific research, she documented the inadequacy of the dichotomous, simplification of division of sexes, groundlessly precluding people who don't fulfill typical criteria and social norms in the area of anatomy or psyche.

Knowledge about the factual human condition presented in such a substantive, impartial and reliable manner as it is done by Renata Zieminska, has a considerable chance to spark positive changes. For that reason, her work ought to be placed on the list of obligatory lectures for secondary schools.

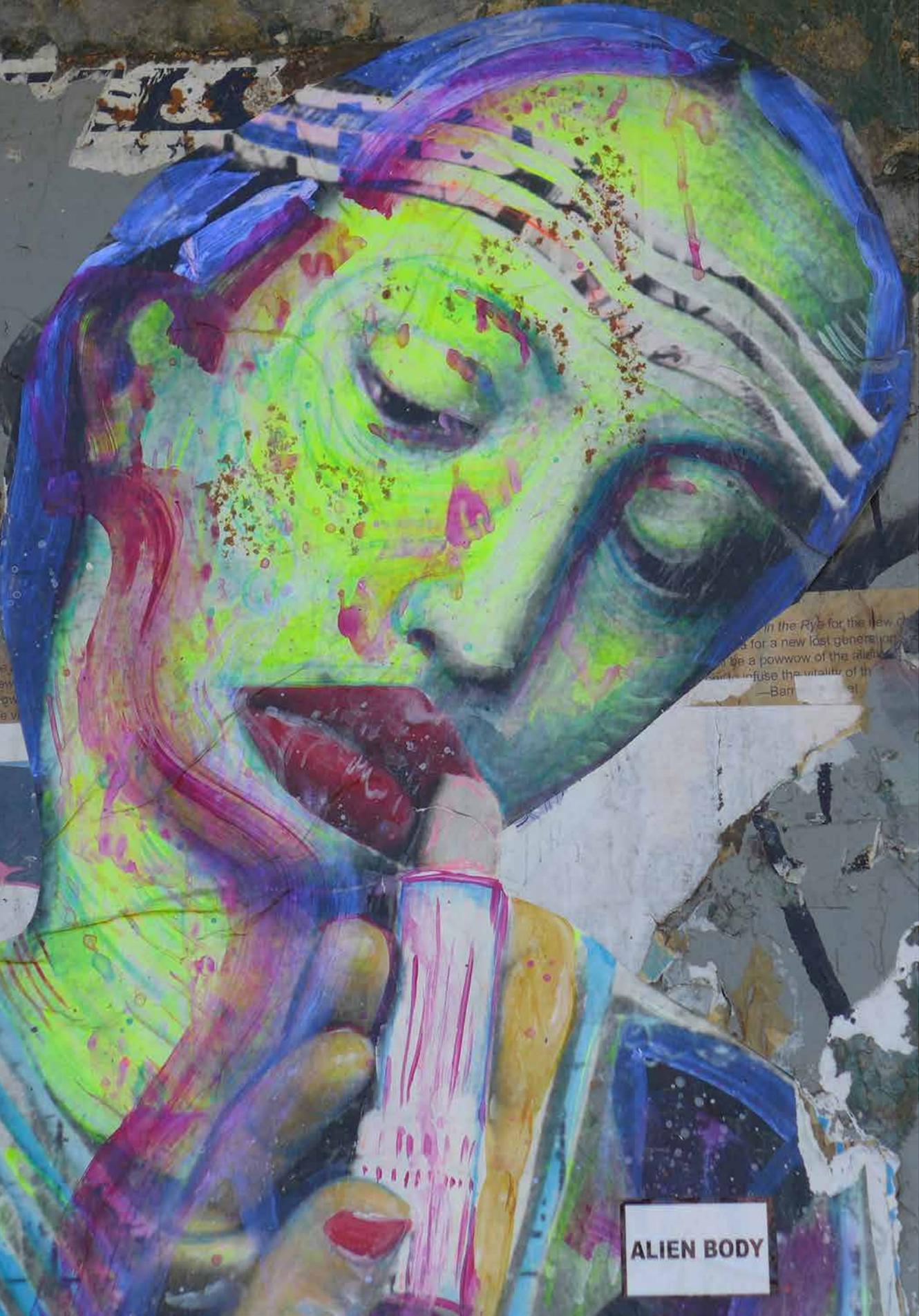
Due to the rich and extensive bibliography, the engaged reader will find also here the information about the latest researches in natural and social sciences.

Zieminska's work is a valuable position especially for Polish readers who have for the last years almost exclusively over simplified and distorted information on this subject used for government, (and the Church), political purposes.

In summary, I highly recommend the presented book. 📖

Ewa Hyży – dr of the humanities, in the field of philosophy. After many years of work at American universities, in 2005 she started working at the Institute of Philosophy, UMCS in Lublin, and then at the Medical University in Lodz. Currently, she teaches classes in English - political philosophy and anthropology, at the University of Humanities and Economics in Lodz. Her publications concern ethics, feminist theories and political philosophy.

² The feminist corporeal philosophy of two Australian theorists E. Gross and M. Gatens has been more widely recognized and widespread only in the last decade of the 20th century.



Men, Who Supported Emancipation

IZA DESPERAK
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book review

Maciej Duda

Emancypanci i emancypatorzy. Mężczyźni wspierający emancypację Polek w drugiej połowie XIX i na początku XX wieku (The Men Who Supported the Emancipation of Polish Women in the Second Half of the 19th and Beginning of the 20th Centuries) Uniwersytet Szczeciński, Rozprawy I Studia T. (MLVII) 983, Szczecin 2017

Polish title of the book starts with two words taken from 19th century Polish, so old fashioned and forgotten, that the English translation omits those terms. “Emancypanci” or “emancypatorzy” might be presented in English as “emancipators” but such a translation loses gender aspect of those names, originally addressing male gender. After development of herstorian studies in Poland, observed from early nineties of previous century, after more and more studies on women’s emancipation published every year, and, finally, after popularisation main female heroines of early feminist movement, it is high time to focus on its male supporters. Maciej Duda is a grandson of one of them, he also represents contemporary supporters of women’s movement in Poland, not only by his research works.

In this book, Maciej Duda returns to his previous research experience. His brilliant book

on Polish war on gender (*Dogmat płci. Polska wojna z gender*, 2016) analysed public anti-gender discourse, emanation of anti-gender movement, powerful especially in Central and East Europe. Here, in *Emancypanci...*, he conducts analysis of past discourses, observed in journalistic texts, delivered statements, proclamation, and polemics, published in 19th and 20th century, in socio-cultural, historical and literary dissertations, he studies both the texts and activities of protagonists of his story, to show un-saved story of men-allies of Polish emancipation of women.

History of 19th century emancipation movement, 20th century first wave of feminism and contemporary experience of equality activism is not the story of women struggling alone against males – as Maciej Duda stated in an interview for “*Wysokie Obcasy*”, women’s supplement for main daily journal. “*Gazeta Wyborcza*” (from July 28th, 2018): the struggle

for equality had both male backers and female antagonists, not every 19th century woman was an emancipist or suffragist, not each contemporary woman is feminist. Therefore the knowledge of the past may be useful for understanding contemporary challenges for gender equality, and reconsideration of some myths and stereotypes concerning men's and women's involvement, making equality the objective for both men and women.

Maciej Duda not only describes main characters of his story, reminds their works, summarises past discussions. He also asks whom were those male emancipators from the view of cultural construction of masculinity, and finds out that they were also revolting against this construct, in fact, their involvement, and their biographies were also redefining traditional definitions of masculinity. Still, such a process may be also observed in contemporary equality movements, requiring new gender roles contract. Finally, while the historical debates might seem outdated or even backward from our perspective, the biographical dimension of the book is more vivid, and its final part devoted to Odo Bujwid and his autobiographical writings addressed to his late wife, Kazimiera Bujwidowa, an icon of Polish suffrage movement, make the best symbolic topping for the history of grandfathers of contemporary male feminists. 👁

Iza Desperak – sociologist, focusing on gender dimension of social and political transition in Poland, published a study on this subject *Płeć zmiany* (UŁ, 2013, 2017), member of Interdisciplinary Gender Seminar (CEIN UŁ), co-editor of two books published by Seminar, and one gender-related issue of our journal (9/2016).

Inne spojrzenie

MAŁGORZATA KATARZYNA RODAK
UNIwersytet Łódzki

recenzja książki

Ewa Majewska

Kontrpubliczności ludowe i feministyczne.

Wczesna „Solidarność” i Czarne Protesty

Instytut Wydawniczy Książka i Prasa, Warszawa 2018

Książkę Ewy Majewskiej uważam za godną polecenia z kilku względów. Przede wszystkim dlatego, że jest niezwykle aktualna i poświęcona współczesnej historii Polski ujętej w nowym paradygmacie badawczym. Autorka skupia uwagę na grupach nieuprzywilejowanych i proponuje przywrócenie należnego miejsca milcząco do tej pory obecnym w historii oraz uznanie ich społecznej i politycznej sprawczości za realnie istniejącą i historycznie istotną. Uważa, że ilość i rozmiary grup pozbawionych sprawczości w oficjalnym dyskursie liberalnym powodują, że ograniczanie analizy do wąskich elit staje się nadużyciem i prowadzi do nieuprawnionych konkluzji. Według Majewskiej historia jest wynikiem sprawczości wielu koegzystujących grup społecznych, które wzajemnie na siebie wpływając współtworzą historię a dotychczas były z niej skutecznie wymazywane i wykluczane przez narrację sprawczości elit. Dostrzega przy tym, że fałszujący opis rzeczywistości społecznej – wymazywanie i wykluczanie podporządkowanych innych z historii i życia publicznego wynika nie tyle ze złej woli wymazujących, co z przyjęcia kulturowo uwarunkowanego, dualistycznego, arystotelesowsko-kartezjańskiego podziału

na: męskie – publiczne – duchowe – sprawcze i kobiece – prywatne – materialne – bierne, który traktuje jako zbyt uproszczony.

Majewska tworzy monografię teorii kontrpubliczności opartą na analizie dwóch politycznych mobilizacji z najnowszej historii Polski: wczesnej „Solidarności” z lat 1980–1981 oraz Czarnych Protestów z lat 2016–2018. Wychodzi od mieszczańsko-liberalnej teorii sfery publicznej Jurgena Habermasa i konsekwentnie obnaża jej słabości. Kontestuje ją jako nieprawomocną, wykluczającą i nieprzydatną do całościowej analizy zjawiska. Uważa, że dziełem burżuazji oprócz budowania sfery publicznej jest ogrom wyzysku, nadużyć i wykluczenia, a komercjalizacja mediów skutecznie eliminuje z publicznej debaty jakąkolwiek rzetelną krytykę klas uprzywilejowanych, czym pogłębia wykluczenie nie-elit. Autorka zdecydowanie sprzeciwia się hegemonii narracji liberalnej. Wskazuje na konieczność doceniania roli wykluczonych w przekształcaniu sfery publicznej i bezkompromisowo podważa pogląd (reprezentowany np. przez Jadwigę Staniszkis) o politycznej bierności klas podporządkowanych. Zdaniem Majewskiej przykład „Solidarności” i Czarnych Protestów pokazuje dobitnie, że wykluczeni zadziałali

oddolnie – nie czekali na przywództwo, dyrektywy, czy zachętę ze strony elit, tylko samodzielnie się zorganizowali i wspólnie wypracowali własne metody, z których dziś możemy być dumni, ponieważ okazały się skuteczne – doprowadziły do zmiany sytuacji społeczno-politycznej w kraju i stały się inspiracją do podobnych działań na świecie. Majewska dowodzi dalej, że systemowe wykluczanie robotników i kobiet z analiz polskiej historii (obecne np. w monografii Andrzeja Friszke *Opozycja polityczna w PRL*, w której na 590 stron tekstu robotnikom poświęcone jest 30, studentom 10 a rolnikom 16, zaś reszta zawiera opis działania inteligencji) wymusza rewizję metodologii badania historii najnowszej, teorii politycznej oraz form organizowania się sfery publicznej w sposób, który uwypukli proces wymazywania politycznej sprawczości kobiet i klas ludowych nie wzmacniając jej wypierania. Autorka postuluje ponowną analizę źródeł historycznych i przyznanie sprawiedliwie należnego miejsca w historii tym, którzy do tej pory byli pomijani w oficjalnym przekazie jako współtwórcy i uczestnicy życia społecznego: kobietom, robotnikom, rolnikom, osobom nieheteronormatywnym, imigrantom i mniejszościom etnicznym, czy religijnym. Wyraża też nadzieję, że proponowana przez nią koncepcja kontrpubliczności ludowych i feministycznych pozwoli wrócić do mniej heroicznych, za to bardziej zaangażowanych w faktyczną praktykę polityczną grup wyzyskiwanych nurtów krytycznych badań nad kulturą i ekonomią polityczną oraz je rozwinąć.

Proponuje politykę wolną od faszystów, która zamiast nostalgicznie sięgać do elitarnej i wykluczającej dla kobiet, klas ludowych i innych grup wyidealizowanej wizji polityki liberalnej tworzy przyszłość ze świadomością dotkliwie obecnych w przeszłości mechanizmów wykluczenia i marginalizacji. Autorka porusza problem tzw. „niesłyszalności” wypowiedzi wykluczonych i uważa, że dyskurs

sfery publicznej nie może być ograniczony do przedstawicieli klas uprzywilejowanych a krytyczna funkcja sfery publicznej polegać wyłącznie na wspieraniu podmiotów już cieszących się uprawnieniami.

Kontrpubliczność Majewska definiuje jako formę sprawczości politycznej (zasadniczo różną od ekskluzywnej, mieszczańskiej, zdominowanej przez mężczyzn i opartej na elitarnym Arystotelesowskim przywileju wolności od konieczności utrzymywania się przy życiu), która zwraca się przeciw istniejącej władzy instytucjonalnej i regułom kultury oraz elitom liberalnym tworzącym sferę publiczną. Autorka dąży do dyskusji warunków (nie)możliwości egalitarnej i inkluzywnej sfery publicznej, poszukuje (zgodnie z wymogami dialektyki teorii krytycznej) takich koncepcji sprawczości politycznej, które nie będą jej ograniczały wyłącznie do reprezentantów inteligencji czy klas wyższych. Uważa, że tego typu badania są szczególnie potrzebne dziś, gdy wciąż odkrywamy dokumentację polskiej historii powojennej i poznajemy ogromną rolę, jaką odegrali w niej tzw. „zwykli ludzie”: robotnicy, robotnice, kobiety „inteligencji pracującej” czy mniejszości etniczne i religijne niesłusznie uznawane za „nieposiadające polskich korzeni” i do tej pory wykluczane z oficjalnego dyskursu.

Autorka krytycznie odnosi się do koncepcji Habermasa utożsamiającego modernizację z demokracją liberalną i dowodzi, że liberalne projekty polityczne są doskonałe do utrwalania a nie zmiany stanu rzeczy ze względu na perfekcyjnie reprodukcyjny wymiar własnych narzędzi politycznych i strategii działania. Uważa, że krytyczna funkcja sfery publicznej jest logicznie i historycznie niemożliwa, jeżeli wykluczmy z niej sprawczość podporządkowanych, ponieważ elity nie modyfikują swoich postaw same z siebie tworząc nowe idee, tylko pod wpływem działań wykluczonych spowodowanych doświadczeniem ucisku (Majewska słusznie zauważa, że wykluczeni posiadają

lepszy wgląd w ograniczenia wolności, niż cieszące się tą wolnością elity). Na przykładzie postaci Lecha Wałęsy, Władysława Frasyniuka, Henryki Krzywonos i innych robotników – przywódców strajków nieposiadających wyższego wykształcenia Majewska kontestuje też pogląd Habermasa o braku historycznej roli plebejskich sfer publicznych. Uważa, że polityczna sprawczość klas ludowych i innych wykluczonych wymyka się analizom dokonany z użyciem narzędzi liberalnej teorii politycznej dlatego, że dokonuje się na przecięciu tego, co publiczne i tego, co prywatne, a te dwie sfery są w dyskursie liberalnym stanowczo rozdzielone. Zdaniem autorki teoria kontrpubliczności okazuje się tu wysoce użytecznym narzędziem.

Autorka rozważa również rolę doboru strategii archiwizacji materiałów historycznych (w odniesieniu do koncepcji Derridy i Zinna) w utrwalaniu stanu istniejącego w społeczeństwie, legitymizowaniu wymazywania i wykluczania. Twierdzi, że w archiwach państwowych przeważa poddany logice starszeństwa i ojcostwa konserwatywny nacisk na ukazywanie powszechnie znanych jednostek zamiast różnych grup i frakcji.

Podnosi też kwestię nostalgii (traktowanej jako romans z własną fantazją) w podejściu do analizowanych wydarzeń historycznych, przez co opis jest stroniczy i uwarunkowany strukturą przeżyć badacza. Ponadto zdaniem Autorki nostalgia za minionym systemem uniemożliwia rozwiązywanie faktycznych konfliktów dotyczących współczesności. Majewska twierdzi, że w tęsknocie za minionymi czasami i kompulsywnym rozpamiętywaniu klęsk buduje się historię monumentalną, heroiczną i pozbawioną krytycyzmu, a więc nieprawdźwą, dodatkowo podważającą wiarę w obecną sprawczość wykluczonych. Wnioskuje, że wprowadzenie stanu wojennego, który zdławił robotnicze protesty, nadał wczesnej „Solidarności” status karnawału i zdecydował o elitarnym charakterze przewrotu 1989 roku,

spowodowało polityczną demobilizację znacznej części społeczeństwa (widoczną w niskiej frekwencji wyborczej) i silne przekonanie społeczne, że prowadzenie polityki oddolnej jest obecnie niemożliwe.

Autorka odwołując się do powszechności, wspólnotowości, inkluzywności i sprawczości wczesnej „Solidarności” postuluje przywrócenie dziedzictwa ruchu robotnikom, z których pracy i walki się zrodziła, i niejako odebranie go elitom, które je zawłaszczyły. Piętnuje dawanie pierwszeństwa własnej narracji elit, systemowej intencjonalne wymazywanie wykluczonych z historii. Zdecydowanie krytykuje też filmy Andrzeja Wajdy (*Człowiek z marmuru*, *Człowiek z żelaza*), które uznane za arcydzieła światowego kina powtórzyły, jej zdaniem, najbardziej znane klisze o Polsce i utrwaliły w świadomości widzów wykluczenie kobiet oraz hegemonię kościoła katolickiego w historii Polski.

Bardzo nowatorskim postulatem jest w mojej ocenie u Majewskiej propozycja, by solidarność społeczną przestać traktować jak braterstwo – męski pakt a zacząć dostrzegać i doceniać (za Carole Pateman) też jej siostrzany aspekt, to znaczy potraktować pracę afektywno-wspierającą kobiet „Solidarności”, ich pozostawanie w domach i opiekę nad protestującymi jako czynną polityczną sprawczość, bez której zmiana w przestrzeni społecznej nie byłaby możliwa. Autorka pyta wprost, czym byłaby „Solidarność” bez kobiet i czy to mężczyźni sami wywalczyli wolność?

Majewska twierdzi, że wypieranie kobiet z historii politycznej, ich niewidzialność wynikająca z przyjętych norm płciowych została zakwestionowana w Czarnych Protestach. Dowodzi, że doświadczenie wykluczonych, polska „wojna z gender”, próba uprzedmiotowienia kobiet spowodowały masowe protesty, które okazały się skuteczną działalnością polityczną, mimo, że dotyczyły sfery intymnej. Historia pokazała, że to, co prywatne

ma duży potencjał mobilizacji politycznej. Autorka zauważa, że w protestach robotników „Solidarności” uczestniczyli głównie mężczyźni a wspierały ich kobiety, natomiast w Czarnym Proteście uczestniczyły głównie kobiety a wspierali je mężczyźni – nastąpiła symboliczna zamiana ról społecznych, ale obie te aktywności są przykładami przekształcenia sfery publicznej przez wykluczonych/wykluczone, którzy/które naruszyli/naruszyły liberalny podział na publiczne i prywatne, są więc dwiema formami kontrpubliczności, kategorii która ułatwia wskazywanie sprawczości podporządkowanych innych w historii społeczeństw. Majewska uważa, że o sile i w konsekwencji skuteczności Czarnych Protestów zdecydował mechanizm budowania wspólnoty słabych i wykluczonych, inkluzywny, powszechny charakter, wykorzystanie internetu i stworzenie możliwości politycznej mobilizacji poprzez kod estetyczny (selfie w czerni na FB). Pokojowy opór słabych okazał się zaskakująco skuteczny w zwalczaniu patriarchalnej polityki zarządzania życiem i śmiercią obywateli – zmienił społeczne przekonanie o aktywności politycznej kobiet, zakończył „wojny z gender”, zatrzymał prace nad ustawą o całkowitym zakazie aborcji, spowodował 10 procentowy spadek popularności partii rządzącej i klęskę państwowo-klerikalnej wersji wzorca martyrologicznego, w której kobiety zdecydowanie odmówiły uczestnictwa.

Zdaniem Majewskiej sprawczość „Solidarności” i Czarnych Protestów wynika nie tylko z masowego i ludowego, ale też z nieheroicznego charakteru tych mobilizacji (żądano w nich, by potraktować nierówności płciowe i klasowe, pracę reprodukcyjną, opiekę, zdrowie, intymność, seksualność i ciało jako problemy polityczne). „Solidarność” i Czarne Protesty przywróciły nadzieję co do możliwości skutecznego, pokojowego i wieloaspektowego ruchu politycznego kontestującego klasyczny podział na sferę publiczną

i prywatną. Były zwrócone przeciwko konserwatywnej, hierarchicznej, liberalnej ideologii politycznej elit, które alienowały podporządkowanych innych w sferze prywatnej broniąc im dostępu do sfery publicznej. Postulowały takie przeformowanie polityki, by dostosowała się do doświadczeń wykluczonych, uwzględniła „rzeczy zwyczajne”, czyli sprawy codzienne jako społecznie istotne, zorientowała się na opiekę i trwanie, a nie na walkę, zryw, cierpienie i śmierć. Politykę potraktowały jak dobro wspólne dostępne dla wszystkich obywateli, a nie tylko dla elit. Kontrpubliczności stały się społeczną krytyką liberalnej, mieszczańskiej koncepcji sfery publicznej i alternatywą dla polityki faszystowskiej zbudowanej na mechanizmach wykluczenia, nienawiści do innych, kolonializmu, patriarchalizmu i autorytaryzmu.



Małgorzata Katarzyna Rodak -

Absolwentka filologii polskiej UŁ, Podyplomowego Studium Inwestycji Kapitałowych WSB w Poznaniu oraz etnologii w ramach Międzyobszarowych Indywidualnych Studiów Humanistyczno-Społecznych UŁ. Doktorantka w Instytucie Etnologii i Antropologii Kulturowej UŁ. Pod kierunkiem prof. dr hab. Ewy Nowina-Sroczyńskiej pisze rozprawę doktorską, w której na przykładzie dzieł sztuki (literatury, filmu, malarstwa, rzeźby) analizuje kulturowe powiązania kobiecości i śmierci. Zainteresowania badawcze dotyczą obszaru antropologii symbolicznej, antropologii sztuki, kobiecości w kulturze, folklorystyki (językowych tekstów folkloru – mitów, baśni, opowieści).

Abnegatki psychiczne, Siłaczki i Wojowniczk

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recenzja książki

Katarzyna Gajek

Doświadczenie przemocy w rodzinie.

Autobiograficzne narracje kobiet

Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2018



Książka Katarzyny Gajek *Doświadczenie przemocy w rodzinie. Autobiograficzne narracje kobiet* to pierwsza, o ile się orientuję, naukowa praca badawcza poświęcona zagadnieniu przemocy w rodzinie, która oparta została w swej warstwie empirycznej o typowe dla metody biograficznej wywiady narracyjne. Owszem, publikowane są różnego rodzaju opracowania oparte na opowieściach kobiet doświadczających przemocy, jednak nie podlegają one zazwyczaj zaawansowanym metodologicznym standardom badań społecznych. Autorka jest pedagogką, i – jak wynika z recenzji wydawniczej Barbary Smolińskiej-Theiss, której fragment znajduje się na okładce – jej książka jest również wyjątkowa na gruncie pedagogiki. Problematyka przemocy wobec kobiet i przemocy w rodzinie wciąż jest marginalizowana w polskim piśmiennictwie naukowym, pozostając domeną raczej działających w tym obszarze organizacji pozarządowych i ekspertek-aktywistek, tymczasem praca Katarzyny Gajek łączy oba podejścia poprzez swe z jednej strony teoretyczne i metodologiczne zaplecze, z drugiej

zaangażowanie: badaczka poświęciła prawie dwa lata na wywiady, wchodząc w świat swych rozmówczyń, przebywających w łódzkim hostelu dla kobiet doświadczających przemocy domowej. Placówka ta pełni nie tylko funkcję schroniska, ale świadczy pomoc także gdy podopieczne przestaną być jego mieszkankami, w książce opisana została jako coś więcej niż hostel.

Teoretyczna i metodologiczna dojrzałość autorki pozwoliła na zastosowaniu metody wywiadu narracyjnego nie ograniczonej jedynie do samego etapu pozyskiwania wypowiedzi badanych, lecz oparciu całej pracy na wykorzystaniu paradygmatu interpretacyjnego z całym dobrodziejstwem teoretycznego inwentarza, co przynosi owoce na poziomie interpretacji uzyskanych wyników. Po zarysowaniu teoretycznego zaplecza pracy, opartego na koncepcji badań biograficznych Fritza Schütze, i roli struktur procesowych, zwłaszcza trajektorii, autorka przechodzi do prezentacji autobiograficznych narracji kobiet podzielnych na trzy przestrzenie: rodziny generacyjnej, ich własnej rodziny oraz ośrodka wsparcia – do którego

trafiają, na skutek doświadczania przemocy, i tam spotyka je autorka.

Książka, oparta o niepublikowaną pracę doktorską (z 2011 roku), została w ciągu kolejnych lat znaczenie poszerzona w swej warstwie teoretycznej i interpretacyjnej w stosunku do pierwowzoru (w 2011 roku). W jednym z swych wystąpień (wykład gościnny dla Interdyscyplinarnego Seminarium Gender, 27 listopada 2018 roku) autorka, zdradziła, że ów odstęp czasu między obroną doktoratu a wydaniem książki wynikał również z charakteru samej jej materii, autorka potrzebowała czasu by odetchnąć i móc powrócić do tej trudnej problematyki.

Obcowanie z problematyką przemocy jest bowiem trudne, i badacze, o ile nie spotka ich zespół wypalenia, nie są takką reakcją uodpornieni. Każda i każdy, kto styka się z relacjami osób doświadczających przemocy, tego doświadcza. Również obcowanie z (niezbyt licznymi) fragmentami relacji w tej książce nie jest łatwe, mimo że sama książka jest świetnie, bezpośrednio napisana, nie przeciążona aparatem naukowym, jednak najlepszy nawet styl nie jest w stanie zrekomensować drastyczności zamieszczonych opisów – i samego tematu przemocy domowej.

Książka jest opracowaniem bardziej interdyscyplinarnym niż socjopedagogicznym, i w taki właśnie sposób Gajek traktuje teoretyczne zaplecze. Choć niewątpliwie odczytana w pracach Anselma Straussa i Fritza Schütze, ich propozycje stosuje w sposób nieco odbiegający moim zdaniem od typowych odczytań socjologicznych. Spośród czterech struktur procesowych autobiografii wyróżnionych przez Fritza Schütze, czyli: biograficznych planów działania, instytucjonalnych wzorców przebiegu życia, trajektorii i przemian biograficznych, autorka szczególną uwagę poświęca trajektorii – zjawisku, które w tym przypadku związane jest z doświadczeniem przemocy, prowadzącym do przełomu w autobiografii

bohaterki. Wydaje się, że zjawisko trajektorii nabiera tu pewnej autonomii, i czasem wręcz autorka nadmiernie nim szafuje, zastępując nim termin „trauma”, znany z licznych psychologicznych opracowań dotyczących przemocy, lub stosuje zamiennie z samym określeniem „doświadczenie przemocy”, gdy chodzi o opis okoliczności, które doprowadziły bohaterkę do placówki pomocowej. Z drugiej strony jednak to trajektoria – wyznaczona przez przemoc – stanowi kluczowy element analizy, to ze względu na nią autorka wyróżnia trzy zasadnicze biograficzne tory badanych doświadczeń kobiet, determinujące ich dalsze losy.

Bohaterki badania to czternaście kobiet przebywających w Specjalistycznym Ośrodku Wsparcia Ofiar Przemocy w Rodzinie w Łodzi, wywiady narracyjne z nimi autorka prowadziła w latach 2008–2009. Kobiety, które się tam trafiły, podjęły samodzielnie lub przy pomocy kogoś z otoczenia decyzję o opuszczeniu sprawcy i udania się do ośrodka, lub zostały zmuszone do tego kroku, bo sprawca wyrzucił je z domu lub tego kroku wymagały od nich instytucje, grożąc ograniczeniem praw rodzicielskich, gdyby pozostały ze sprawcą pod jednym dachem. To bardzo ważne odkrycie, z perspektywy poszukiwań praktycznych rozwiązań dla polityk przeciwpromocowych czy pomocy kobietom doświadczającym przemocy. Opuszczenie wspólnie ze sprawcą zajmowanego domu czy mieszkania bywa często przedstawiane jako graniczny, ale niezbędny do zerwania z cyklem przemocy akt, bez którego rzekomo kobiety nie są gotowe na zerwanie ze sprawcą, podjęcie kroków prawnych, zdobycie ekonomicznej niezależności i wreszcie odbudowę własnego życia. Z opowieści bohaterki książki, każdorazowo doświadczających systematycznej i dramatycznej przemocy w związkach, wynika że nawet tak graniczne doświadczenie nie musi się przekładać na decyzję o zgłoszeniu się do schroniska. Lub też, z drugiej strony, decyzja ta może być porównywalnie trudna.

Na podstawie analizy biografii uczestniczek badania autorka wyróżnia trzy typy przebiegu życia, stanowiące procesualne modele biografii („Abnegatki psychiczne”, „Siłaczki” i „Wojowniczkki”). Paradoksalnie, to zaliczonym do tej ostatniej grupy najtrudniej było podjąć samodzielnie decyzję o zgłoszeniu się do schroniska – do ostatniej chwili próbowały strategii walki. Te trzy grupy różnią się ze względu na odmienne sposoby korzystania przez bohaterki ze wsparcia społecznego, oraz strategię przyjmowaną przez nie wobec zewnętrznych okoliczności i działań innych ludzi. Opierając się na tych wynikach, autorka postuluje, by instytucjonalne modele wsparcia uwzględniały przeszłe doświadczenia kobiet, aktualny kontekst oraz ich plany na przyszłość. Zwraca też uwagę na odmienne funkcje samej instytucji schroniska w przemianie biograficznej bohaterki, niezbędnej do zbudowania nowej, wolnej od przemocy, ścieżki autobiograficznej. Tylko dla części z nich pobyt w schronisku w ten sposób służy, dostarczając instytucjonalnego wzorca normatywnego, który może wyznaczyć nową stabilną i wolną od przemocy autobiografię. Oferowana przez Specjalistyczny Ośrodek Wsparcia pomoc prawna, psychologiczna czy socjalna może okazać się niewystarczająca. Katarzyna Gajek zwraca też uwagę na rolę więzi ze sprawcą, występującej niezależnie od doświadczanej z jego strony przemocy, i uczucie braku jakiegokolwiek stabilizacji wśród przebywających w placówce kobiet. To kolejny powód, dla którego jej książka powinna trafić nie tylko do akademickiej publiczności, ale praktyków odpowiedzialnych za działania antyprzemocowe i osób pracujących na co dzień z kobietami doświadczającymi przemocy. 

Iza Desperak – socjolożka, której obecne zainteresowania naukowe skoncentrowane są na transformacji społeczno-politycznej w Polsce z perspektywy gender. Autorka książki *Płeć zmiany*

(Uł, 2013, 2017), członkini Interdyscyplinarnego Seminarium Gender (CEIN UŁ). Współredaktorka dwóch książek wydanych pod jego auspicjami oraz nr 9/2016 czasopisma *Władza Sądzenia*, poświęconego tematyce gender.



Przełamać srebrne tabu, czyli o próbie aktywizacji osób starszych

MARTYNA KROGULEC
UNIwersYTET ŁÓDZKI

recenzja książki

Monika Kamieńska, Monika Mularska-Kucharek
Srebrne tabu. Przyjaźń, miłość i seks w wieku dojrzałym
Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2018

Książka *Srebrne tabu. Przyjaźń, miłość i seks w wieku dojrzałym* autorstwa Moniki Kamieńskiej i Moniki Mularskiej-Kucharek to pozycja, której tematem jest „jesień życia”, ukazana z perspektywy towarzyszących jej szans i możliwości. Celem niniejszego opracowania jest więc pokazanie różnych strategii radzenia sobie ze starością, a co za tym idzie –przełamywanie dotychczasowych stereotypów oraz społecznego tabu związanego z rolą i funkcjonowaniem osób starszych w naszym społeczeństwie.

Przybliżone w niniejszej publikacji historie opowiadają o polskich seniorach seniorkach pochodzących z różnych środowisk, mających odmienne sytuacje osobiste i zainteresowania. Wszystkich bohaterów łączy jednak ogromny upór i brak pokory wobec społecznie narzuconych norm, a także głęboka wiara w to, że tzw. „późna dorosłość” jest doskonałym czasem na realizację własnych pasji, marzeń i planów.

Książka zawiera dwanaście wywiadów przeprowadzonych przez Autorki opracowania – sześć rozmów ze znanymi seniorami oraz sześć opowieści „zwykłych” ludzi, którzy

na emeryturze realizują swoje pasje. Całość została uzupełniona poradami eksperckimi dotyczącymi poprawy jakości życia osób starszych. W rezultacie publikacja stanowi zbiór różnego rodzaju narracji, które zostały osadzone w trzech sferach, tworzących jednocześnie tytuły rozdziałów tj. *Znani i lubiani*, *Zwykli niezwykli* i *Eksperti o srebrnym tabu*. Niecodzienną formę publikacji uzupełnia wstęp (*Zamiast wprowadzenia*) w postaci zapisu dialogu między Moniką Kamieńską a Moniką Mularską-Kucharek, w którym to Autorki nakreślają pokrótce problematykę dotyczącą funkcjonowania osób starszych w polskim społeczeństwie, a także cel i motywacje towarzyszące tworzeniu tej książki.

Publikację rozpoczyna część *Znani i lubiani* zawierająca wywiady z seniorami kojarzonymi z telewizji na tematy związane zarówno z samorealizacją w wieku późnej dorosłości w kwestii relacji interpersonalnych (miłości, przyjaźni, seksu), jak również sposobów spędzania czasu wolnego i rozwoju własnych zainteresowań. Każda rozmowa zatytułowana została mottem zaczerpniętym

z przeprowadzanego wywiadu. Autorki publikacji do współpracy zaprosiły aktorki: Teresę Lipowską (*Na miłość nigdy nie jest za późno*) i Krystynę Sienkiewicz (*Ja nie jestem stara, ja się staram* – jedna z ostatnich oficjalnych wypowiedzi artystki) oraz aktora Andrzeja Precigsa (*Do szczęścia potrzebujemy innych ludzi*). Ponadto w tej części wśród rozmówców znaleźli się również: znany prezenter Ryszard Rembiszewski (*Zachować twarz, być sobą, być prawym człowiekiem, być szczęśliwym*), choreografka i tancerka – Krystyna Mazurówna (*Miłość to jedyny cud, który zdarza się w życiu, i to bez względu na wiek*) oraz popularna polska podróżniczka – Zofia Suska (*Trzeba kochać ludzi i trzeba cieszyć się z każdego wschodu słońca*).

Druga część publikacji tj. *Zwykli niezwykli*, została poprowadzona przez Autorki w analogiczny sposób z tym, że swoimi przemyśleniami na temat życia w wieku srebrnym dzieli się tzw. „zwykli ludzie”. Warto zwrócić w tym miejscu uwagę, że o ile w pierwszej części większy nacisk kładziono na opinie uczestników rozmów na kwestie związane ze sferą uczuciową (szanse na przyjaźń, miłość, rolę seksualności w życiu seniorów), o tyle w tej części na pierwszy plan wysuwają się sposoby samoaktywizacji i samorealizacji osób starszych. Mamy więc tutaj wywiady z seniorami, którzy dzielą się swoimi pasjami teatralnymi – Włodzimierzem Podgórskim (*Trzeba żyć tak, żeby w sercu mieć młodość*) i Izabelą Majewską (*Jestem uzależniona od teatru*), literackimi – Andrzejem Ziemowitem Zimowskim (*Życie to podróż...*) i Hanną Piekarską (*Mam apetyt na życie*), malarskimi – Barbarą Gorayską (*Życie pełną piersią jest prawem ludzkim każdego człowieka*) oraz podróżniczymi – Urszulą Kasjaniuk (*Teraz już wszystko mogę, nic nie muszę!*).

Na ostatnią część publikacji *Ekspersi o srebrnym tabu* składa się sześć tekstów dotyczących różnych dziedzin życia, z których osoby starsze są stopniowo odsuwane i stereotypowo

wyłączane w naszym społeczeństwie. Pod pojęciem srebrnego tabu kryją się tutaj poruszane w całym opracowaniu tematy takie jak: przyjaźń, miłość, seks osób starszych, prawdo do posiadania przez nie własnych pasji i zainteresowań, prawo do atrakcyjnego wyglądu. Rozdział rozpoczyna tekst Moniki Mularskiej-Kucharek (*Miłość dojrzała niejedno ma imię*) dotyczący różnych odcieni miłości w wieku senioralnym i zawierający wiele porad, które mają pomóc oswoić się z tym uczuciem niezależnie od posiadanego wieku. Niejaki uzupełnienie tekstu Moniki Mularskiej-Kucharek stanowi artykuł Ewy Czernik (*Uciekać przed słońcem nie hańba, czyli co samotność robi z człowiekiem, a człowiek z samotnością*), w którym to Autorka porusza tematy samotności i osamotnienia dotykających osoby starsze oraz wskazuje na strategię radzenia sobie z tymi problemami. Bardzo ważnym w kontekście walki ze stereotypami na temat osób w podeszłym wieku wydaje się tekst Bianci-Beaty Kotoro – *Człowiek jest istotą seksualną od narodzin aż do śmierci* dotyczący seksualnego wymiaru życia seniorów. O potrzebie społecznej aktywizacji osób w wieku senioralnym i jej pozytywnych skutkach pisze natomiast Monia Kamieńska w artykule *Nie PESEL czyni człowieka. Czyli o kreatywnym starzeniu się*. Rozdział zamykają dwa krótkie teksty Ewy Kozieradzkiej (*Ubierać a nie przebierać*) i Andrzeja Cieślaka (*Luz kontrolowany*) dotyczące porad mody dla senierek i seniorów.

Tak jak w przypadku wprowadzenia do lektury, również jej podsumowanie (*Zamiast zakończenia*) przedstawiono w formie dialogu między Moniką Kamieńską i Moniką Mularską-Kucharek, w którym Autorki przedstawiają ogólne wnioski z publikacji, swoje odczucia związane z jej ukazaniem oraz podziękowania dla osób, które pomogły przy powstaniu niniejszej książki.

Nie ulega wątpliwości, że książka Moniki Kamieńskiej i Moniki Mularskiej-Kucharek

dotyka tematów niezwykle istotnych dla naszego społeczeństwa. Jak słusznie zauważają Autorki, nieustannie wzrastająca liczba osób w wieku senioralnym w naszym kraju wiąże się ze zmianami nie tylko w ilościowym, ale przede wszystkim w jakościowym aspekcie starości. Współcześni seniorzy coraz więcej oczekują od życia, traktując etap emerytalny jako czas, w którym z powodzeniem mogą się realizować. Czasem jednak ich dążenia są znacznie utrudnione lub wręcz niemożliwe ze względu na czynniki społecznościowe i funkcjonujące stereotypy na temat osób starszych. Niestety, chociaż niniejsza publikacja ma za zadanie nakłaniać seniorów do różnego rodzaju aktywności, można odnieść wrażenie, że pomija ona punkt widzenia osób z niewielkich miejscowości, gdzie po pierwsze normy społeczne ciągle są bardziej restrykcyjne niż w dużych miastach, po drugie brakuje instytucjonalnych form aktywizacji osób starszych. Tam stereotyp starości jako schyłkowego etapu życia, który wiąże się albo z opieką nad wnukami, albo z samotnością jest ciągle żywy i ma się całkiem nieźle. Autorki przyjmując miastocentryczną perspektywę zdają się nie dostrzegać tego problemu, co niestety znacznie słyca całość kształt publikacji.

Dużym plusem niniejszej książki wydaje się zacerpienie opinii seniorów, co dla niektórych Czytelników może stanowić źródło inspiracji i pomóc rozwiązać wewnętrzne dylematy między „chcę, ale boję się”. Tematy poruszane w wywiadach są jak najbardziej aktualne i istotne z punktu widzenia współczesnych seniorów, ale również i młodszych odbiorców. Każdy z nas ma wokół siebie osoby w wieku senioralnym, większość z nas sama będzie kiedyś w tym wieku, dlatego niezwykle ważne w czasach kultu młodości jest osvajanie ludzi z tym etapem życia i pokazywanie, że jak na każdym z poprzednich mają oni prawo do radości, miłości, seksu i pasji. Nawoływanie do wyswobodzenia się

z okowów funkcjonujących stereotypów właśnie z ust aktywnych seniorów jest więc głosem niezwykle ważnym, a ukazanie ich seniorskiego życia jednym z najciekawszych elementów niniejszej lektury. Niestety, momentami można odnieść wrażenie zbytowego narzucania odpowiedzi przez Autorki, uciążliwe wydają się również ich dłuższe odautorskie wtrącenia podczas przeprowadzanych rozmów. Jako kontrargument można tutaj przytoczyć, że nie jest to książka *stricte* socjologiczna, więc i wywiady nie musiały trzymać się metodologicznych restrykcji, jednak w kontekście niezwykle ciekawych życiorysów, wspomniane zabiegi zdają się wybijać rozmówców z rytmu, narzucać im pewien sposób myślenia, a tym samym i zubażać przesłanie zaproszonych do współpracy osób.

Częściowym rozczarowaniem jest również ostatni rozdział dotyczący porad eksperckich. Z jednej strony stanowi on dobre „domknięcie” całości publikacji. Zaproszone osoby rzeczywiście aktywnie współpracują z osobami starszymi, mają więc najlepszy ogląd na problemy i dylematy, z jakimi się one na co dzień borykają. Autorki poruszając temat prawa do miłości, sposobów na samotność, pomysłów na atrakcyjny wygląd (zarówno kobiet jak i mężczyzn), wydają się dobrze oddawać potrzeby współczesnego seniora. Niezwykle ważnym wydaje się w kontekście całego tego rozdziału artykuł dotyczący seksualności osób w wieku emerytalnym, która w naszym kraju jest chyba najdotkliwiej obciążona tytułowym „srebrnym tabu”. Poradnikowy charakter tej części publikacji w prosty i skondensowany sposób przedstawia receptę na wyzwolenie się ze stereotypów i różnego rodzaju tabu związanych z tym etapem życia. Z drugiej jednak strony wiele do życzenia pozostawia sposób prezentacji pewnych danych. Szczególnie dotkliwy jest brak przypisów w większości eksperckich artykułów. Tym sposobem potencjalny Czytelnik nie ma możliwości dowiedzenia się chociażby na jakie

badania i źródła powołują się Autorzy tekstów (wyjątkiem są artykuły Bianci-Beaty Kotoro i Moniki Kamieńskiej). Jest to największy minus niniejszej publikacji, ponieważ nie dość, że zamyka drogę do poszukiwania dalszych informacji, to zbytne uproszczenie tekstu niechlubnie wpisuje się w jeden z najbardziej bolesnych stereotypów krążących na temat osób w podeszłym wieku – a mianowicie postrzeganie ich jako dziecienniałych i niezainteresowanych rzeczami wymagającymi wysiłku intelektualnego. Warto w tym miejscu zwrócić uwagę, że jest to niezwykle niebezpieczne, ponieważ ten stereotyp tak naprawdę leży u podstaw wszystkich innych, odbierając osobom starszym właśnie prawo do miłości, szczęścia czy samorealizacji.

Podsumowując, dbałość o komfort i jakość życia osób starszych jest też niezwykle istotna szczególnie z perspektywy przewidywanej średniej długości życia. Bardzo ważnym elementem jest więc znalezienie odpowiedniego miejsca w naszym społeczeństwie dla seniorów i pozwolenie im na czerpanie radości z tego etapu. Niniejsza publikacja z pewnością pomaga uzmysłwić odbiorcom, że niezależnie od wieku, każdy człowiek ma prawo do miłości i samorealizacji. Książka Moniki Kamieńskiej i Moniki Mularskiej-Kucharek z powodzeniem pokazuje starość/późną dorosłość/wiek srebrny jako czas, który może być źródłem ogromnej satysfakcji i szczęścia. Otwarte podejście Auterek i osób, które wzięły aktywny udział przy tworzeniu tej publikacji do kwestii takich jak: miłość, przyjaźń czy seks bez wątplenia może się przyczynić do stopniowego przełamywania społecznego tabu związanego z tym etapem ludzkiego życia.

Największym atutem *Srebrnego tabu...* jest to, że dzięki różnorodnej tematyce i przystępności języka (czasem zbyt uproszczonego), z powodzeniem może ono trafić do różnych grup odbiorców – począwszy od przedstawicieli środowiska seniorskiego, skończywszy na

osobach, których zainteresowania naukowe/zawodowe koncentrują się w obrębie działań na rzecz osób starszych. Zainteresowanie publikacją powinni wykazywać jednak nie tylko seniorzy i osoby z nimi współpracujące, ale każdy, kto chciałby funkcjonować w społeczeństwie, w którym miłość, radość i pasja są dostępne na każdym etapie życia dla jego członków, ponieważ jak mówił Hugo Steinhaus „Na starość jest młodość potrzebniejsza niż za młodu”. 🧐

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